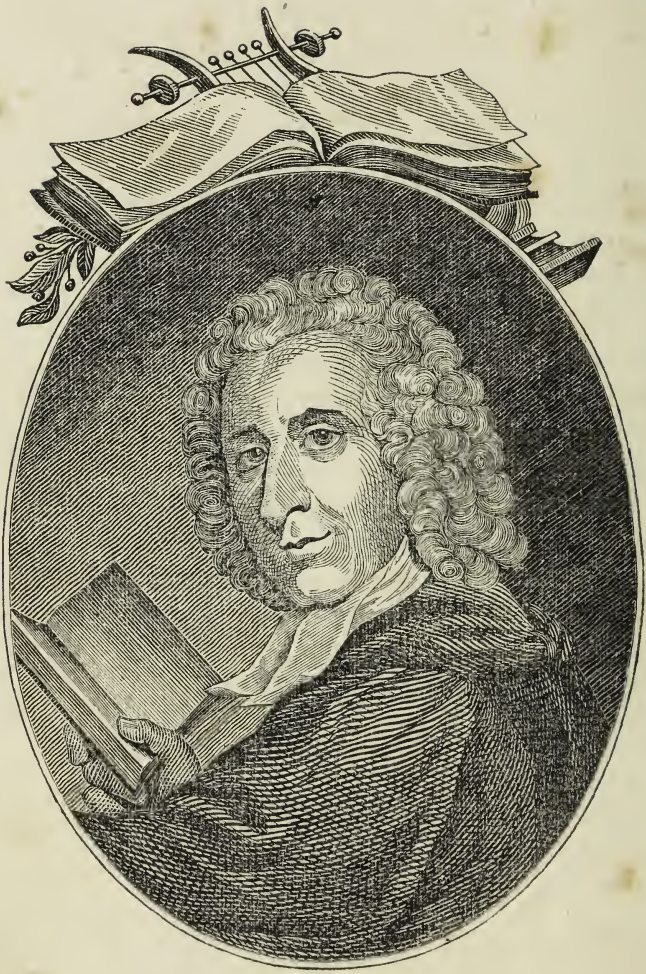

I. Watts, D. D.

THE

WORLD TO COME;

OR,

DISCOURSES ON THE JOYS OR SORROWS

OF

DEPARTED SOULS AT DEATH,

AND

THE GLORY OR TERROR OF THE RESURRECTION.

BY I. WATTS, D. D.

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PREFACE.

Among all the solemn and important things which relate to religion, there is nothing that strikes the soul of man with so much awe and solemnity as the scenes of death, and the dreadful or delightful consequences which attend it. Who can think of entering into that unknown region where spirits dwell, without the strongest impressions upon the mind, arising from so strange a manner of existence? Who can take a survey of the resurrection of the millions of the dead, and of the tribunal of Christ whence men and angels must receive their doom, without the most painful solicitude, "What will my sentence be?" Who can meditate on the intense and unmingled pleasure or pain in the world to come, without the most pathetic emotions of soul, since each of us must be determined to one of these states, and they are both of everlasting duration?

These are the things that touch the springs of every passion in the most sensible manner, and raise our hopes and our fears to their supreme exercise. These are the subjects with which our blessed Saviour and his apostles frequently entertained their hearers, in order to persuade them to hearken and attend to the divine lessons which they published among them. These were some of the sharpest weapons of their holy warfare, which entered into the inmost vitals of mankind and pierced their consciences with the highest solicitude. These have been the happy means to awaken thousands of sinners to flee from the wrath to come, and to allure and hasten them

to enter into that glorious refuge that is set before them in the gospel.

My design, therefore, has been to set the great and most momentous things of a future world in the most convincing and affecting light, and to enforce them upon the conscience with all the fervour that such subjects demand and require. And may our blessed Redeemer, who reigns Lord of the invisible world, pronounce these words with a divine power to the heart of every man who shall either read or hear them.

The last discourses of this volume, especially the eternity of the punishments of hell, have been in latter and former years made a matter of dispute; and were I to pursue my inquiries into this doctrine, only by the aids of the light of nature and reason, I fear my natural tenderness might warp me aside from the rules and the demands of strict justice, and the wise and holy government of the great God.

But as I confine myself almost entirely to the revelation of scripture in all my searches into the things of revealed religion and Christianity, I am constrained to forget or to lay aside that softness and tenderness of animal nature which might lead me astray, and to follow the unerring dictates of the word of God.

The scripture frequently and in the plainest and strongest manner, asserts the everlasting punishment of sinners in hell; and that by all the methods of expression which are used in scripture to signify an everlasting continuance.

God's utter hatred and aversion to sin, in this perpetual punishment of it, are manifested many ways, (1.) By the just and severe threatenings of the wise and righteous Governor of the world, which are scattered up and down in his word. (2.) By the ve-

racity of God in his intimations or narratives of past events, as Jude 7. Sodom and Gomorrha suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (3.) By his express predictions. Matt. xxv. 46: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." 2 Thess. i. 9: "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction;" and I might add, (4.) By the veracity and truth of all his holy prophets and apostles, and his Son Jesus Christ at the head of them, whom he has sent to acquaint mankind with the rules of their duty, and the certain judgment of God in a holy correspondence therewith, and that in such words as seem to admit of no way of escape, or of hope for the condemned criminals.

I must confess here, if it were possible for the great and blessed God any other way to vindicate his own eternal and unchangeable hatred of sin, the inflexible justice of his government, the wisdom of his severe threatenings and the veracity of his predictions, if it were also possible for him, without this terrible execution, to vindicate the veracity, sincerity and wisdom of the prophets and apostles, and Jesus Christ his Son, the greatest and chiefest of his divine messengers; and then if the blessed God should at any time, in a consistence with his glorious and incomprehensible perfections, release those wretched creatures from their acute pains and long imprisonment in hell, either with a design of the utter destruction of their beings by annihilation, or to put them into some unknown world, upon a new foot of trial, I think I ought cheerfully and joyfully to accept this appointment of God, for the good of millions of my fellow-creatures, and add my joys and praises to all the songs and triumphs of the heavenly world in the day of such a divine and glorious release of these prisoners.

But I feel myself under a necessity of confessing, that I am utterly unable to solve these difficulties according to the discoveries of the New Testament, which must be my constant rule of faith and hope, and expectation, with regard to myself and others. I have read the strongest and best writers on the other side, yet after all my studies I have not been able to find any way how these difficulties may be removed, and how the divine perfections and the conduct of God in his word, may be fairly vindicated without the establishment of this doctrine, as awful and formidable as it is.

The ways indeed of the great God and his thoughts are above our thoughts and our ways, as the heavens are above the earth; yet I must rest and acquiesce where our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father's chief minister both of his wrath and his love, has left me in the divine revelations of scripture; and I am constrained, therefore, to leave these unhappy creatures under the chains of everlasting darkness, into which they have cast themselves by their wilful iniquities, till the blessed God shall see fit to release them.

This would be indeed such a new, such an astonishing and universal jubilee, both for devils and wicked men as must fill heaven, earth, and hell, with hallelujahs and joy: in the mean time it is my ardent wish, that this awful sense of the terrors of the Almighty, and his everlasting anger, which the word of the great God denounces, may awaken some souls timely to bethink themselves of the dreadful danger into which they are running, before these terrors seize them at death and begin to be executed upon them without release and without hope.

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DISCOURSES

ON

THE WORLD TO COME.

DISCOURSE I.

THE END OF TIME.

REV. x. 5, 6.

And the angel, which I saw stand upon the sea, and upon the earth, lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever,—That there should be time no longer.

THIS is the oath, and the solemn sentence of a mighty angel, who came down from heaven, and by the description of him in the first verse, he seems to be the angel of God's presence, in whom is the name of God, even our Lord Jesus Christ himself, who pronounced and sware, that time should be no longer; for all seasons and times are now put into his hand, together with the book of his Father's decrees; Rev. v. 7, 9. What special age or period of time, in this world, the prophecy refers to, may not be so easy to determine; but this is certain, that it may be happily applied to the period of every man's life; for whensoever the term of our continuance in this world is finished, our time, in the present circumstances and scenes that attend it, shall be no

more. We shall be swept off the stage of this visible state into an unseen and eternal world: eternity comes upon us at once, and all that we enjoy, all that we do, and all that we suffer in time, shall be no longer.

Let us stand still here, and consider, in the first place, what awful and important thoughts are contained in this sentence, what solemn ideas should arise to the view of mortal creatures, when it shall be pronounced concerning each of them, that time shall be no more.

1. The time of the recovery of our nature from its sinful and wretched state shall be no longer. We come into this world fallen creatures, children of iniquity, and heirs of death; we have lost the image of God, who made us, and which our nature enjoyed in our first parents; and, instead of it, we are changed into the image of the devil, in the lusts of the mind, in pride and malice, in self-sufficiency and enmity to God; and we have put on also the image of the brute, in sinful appetites and sensualities, and in the lusts of the flesh; nor can we ever be made truly happy, till the image of the blessed God be restored upon us, till we are made holy, as he is holy, till we have a divine change passed upon us, whereby we are created anew, and reformed in heart and practice. And this life is the only time given us for this important change. If this life be finished, before the image of God be restored to us, this image will never be restored; but we shall bear the likeness of devils for ever; and perhaps the image of the brute too, at the resurrection of the body, and be farther off from God, and all that is holy, than ever we were here upon earth.

Of what infinite importance is it, then, to be frequently awakening ourselves, at special seasons and periods of life, to inquire, whether this image of God is begun to be renewed, whether we have this glorious

change wrought in us, whether our desires and delights are fixed upon holy and heavenly things, instead of those sensual and earthly objects, which draw away all our souls from God and heaven. Let it appear to us as a matter of utmost moment to seek after this change; let us pursue it with unwearied labours and strivings with our own hearts, and perpetual importunities at the throne of grace, lest the voice of him who swears that there shall be time no longer, should seize us in some unexpected moment, and lest he swear in his wrath concerning us, "Let him that is holy be holy still, and let him that is filthy be filthy still," Rev. xxii. 11.

2. When this sentence is pronounced concerning us, the season and the means of restoring us to the favour and love of God shall be no longer. We are born children of wrath, as well as the sons and daughters of iniquity; Eph. ii. 3. We have lost the original favour of our Maker and are banished from his love, and the superior blessings of his goodness; and yet, blessed be the Lord, that we are not at present for ever banished beyond all hope; this time of life is given us to seek the recovery of the love of God, by returning to him according to the gospel of his Son; now is pardon and peace, now is grace and salvation preached unto men, to sinful wretched men, who are at enmity with God, and the objects of his high displeasure; now the voice of mercy calls to us, "This is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation;" 2 Cor. vi. 2. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, let not your hearts be hardened to refuse it;" Heb. iii. 15. Now the fountain of the blood of Christ is set open to wash our souls from the guilt of sin; now all the springs of his mercy, are broken up in the ministrations of the gospel; now God is in Christ, reconciling sinners to himself; 2 Cor. v. 19, and he has sent us, his ministers, to entreat you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God; and we

beseech you in his name, continue not one day or one hour longer in your enmity and rebellion, but be ye reconciled to God, your Creator, and accept of his offered forgiveness and grace, verse 20.

The moment is hastening upon us, when this mighty angel, who manages the affairs of the kingdom of providence, shall swear concerning every unbelieving and impenitent sinner, that the time of offered mercy shall be no longer, the time of pardon and grace and reconciliation shall be no more: the sound of this mercy reaches not to the regions of the dead; those who die before they are reconciled, die under the load of all their sins, and must perish for ever, without the least hope or glimpse of reconciling or forgiving grace.

3. At the term of this mortal life, the time of prayer and repentance and service for God or man in this world shall be no longer. Eccl. ix. 10. "There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest," whither we are all hastening. Let every sinful creature therefore ask himself, Have I never yet begun to pray? Never begun to call upon the mercy of the God that made me? Never begun to repent of all my crimes and follies? Nor begun in good earnest to do service for God, or to honour him amongst men? Dreadful thought indeed!—when, it may be, the next hour we may be put out of all capacity and opportunity to do it for ever! As soon as ever an impenitent sinner has the veil of death drawn over him, all his opportunities of this kind are for ever cut off: he that has never repented, never prayed, never honoured his God, shall never be able to pray or repent, or do any thing for God or his honour through all the ages of his future immortality: nor is there any promise made to repenting or returning sinners in the other world, whither we are hastening. As the tree falls, when it is cut down, so it lies, and it must for ever lie;

pointing to the north or the south, to hell or heaven; Eccles. xi. 3.

And, indeed, there is no true prayer, no sincere repentance, can be exercised after this life; for the soul that has wasted away all its time given for repentance and prayer, is at the moment of death left under everlasting hardness of heart; and whatsoever enmity against God and godliness was found in the heart in this world, is increased in the world to come, when all manner of softening means and mercies are ever at an end. This leads me to the next thought.

4. How wretched soever our state is at death, the day of hope is ended, and it returns no more. Be our circumstances never so bad, yet we are not completely wretched while the time of hope remains. We are all by nature miserable by reason of sin, but it is only despair can perfect our misery. Therefore fallen angels are sealed up under misery because there is no door of hope opened for them. But in this life there is hope for the worst of sinful men: there is the word of grace and hope calling them in the gospel; there is the voice of divine mercy sounding in the sanctuary, and "blessed are they that hear the joyful sound;" Ps. lxxxix. 15. But if we turn the deaf ear to the voice of God and his Son, and to all the tender and compassionate entreaties of a dying Saviour, hope is hastening to its period; for this very angel will shortly swear, that this joyful sound shall be heard no longer.

He comes now to the door of our hearts, he sues there for admittance: Open unto me, and receive me as your Saviour and your Lord; give me and my gospel free admission, and I will come in and bestow upon you the riches of my grace and all my salvation: open your hearts to me with the holy desires and humble submission of penitence, and receive the blessings of righteousness and pardon and eternal

life. He now invites you to return to God, with an acknowledgment and renunciation of every sin, and he offers to take you by the hand, and introduce you into his Father's presence with comfort: this is a day of hope for the vilest and most hateful criminals; but if you continue to refuse, he will shortly swear in his wrath, you shall never enter into his kingdom, you shall never taste of the provisions of his grace, you shall never be partakers of the blessings purchased with his blood. Heb. iii. 11, 18. "I sware in my wrath," saith the Lord, "they shall not enter into my rest."

Oh the dreadful state of sinful creatures, who continue in such obstinacy, who waste away the means of grace and the seasons of hope, week after week, and month after month, till the day of grace and hope is for ever at an end with them! Hopeless creatures! Under the power and the plague of sin, under the wrath and curse of God, under the eternal displeasure of Jesus, who was once the minister of his Father's love, and they must abide under all this wretchedness through a long eternity, and in the land of everlasting despair. But I forbear that theme at present, and proceed.

5. At the moment of our death the time of our preparation for the hour of judgment, and for the ensurance of heaven and happiness shall be no longer. Miserable creatures, that are summoned to die thus unprepared! This life is the only time to prepare for dying, to get ready to stand before the Judge of the whole earth, and to secure our title to the heavenly blessedness. Let my heart inquire, have I ever seriously begun to prepare for a dying hour, and to appear before the Judge of all? Have I ever concerned myself in good earnest, to secure an interest in the heavenly inheritance, when this earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved? Have I ever made interest for the favour of God, and a share of the inheritance

of the saints by Jesus, the great Mediator, while he afforded life and time?

Death is daily and hourly hastening upon us: Death is the king of terrors, and will fulfil all his name to every soul that is unprepared. It is a piece of wisdom then for every one of us, since we must die, to search and feel whether death has lost its sting or not: whether it be taken away by the blood of Christ. Is this blood sprinkled on my conscience, by the humble exercise of faith on a dying Saviour? Are the terrors of death removed, and am I prepared to meet it by the sanctifying influences of the blessed Spirit? Have I such an interest in the covenant of grace as takes away the sting of death, as turns the curse into a blessing, and changes the dark scenes of death into the commencement of a new and everlasting life? This is that preparation for dying for which our time of life was given us, and happy are those who are taught of God to make this use of it.

Judgment is making haste towards us; months and days of divine patience are flying swiftly away, and the last great day is just at hand; then we must give an account of "all that has been done in the body, whether it has been good or evil;" 2 Cor. v. 10, and what a dismal and distressing surprise will it be to have the Judge come upon us in a blaze of glory and terror, while we have no good account to give at his demand! And yet this is the very end and design of all our time, which is lengthened out to us on this side the grave, and of all the advantages that we have enjoyed in this life, that we may be ready to render up our account with joy, to the Judge of all the earth.

Heaven is not ours by birth and inheritance, as lands and houses on earth descend to us from our earthly parents. We as well as they are by nature unfit for heaven, and children of wrath; but we may

be born again, we may be born of God, and become heirs of the heavenly inheritance through Jesus Christ: we may be renewed into the temper and spirit of heaven; and this life is the only season that is given us for this important change: shall we let our days and years pass away one after another in long succession, and continue the children of wrath still? Are we contented to go on this year as the last without a title to heaven, without a divine temper, and without any preparation for the business or the blessedness of that happy world?

6. When this life comes to an end, the time of all our earthly comforts and amusements shall be no more. We shall have none of these sensible things around us to employ or entertain our eyes or our ears, to gratify our appetites, to sooth our passions, or to support our spirits in distress. All the infinite variety of cares, labours and joys, which surround us here, shall be no more: life with all the busy scenes and the pleasing satisfactions of it dissolve and perish together: have a care then that you do not make any of them your chief hope, for they are but the things of time, they are all short and dying enjoyments.

Under the various calamities of this life we find a variety of sensible reliefs, and our thoughts and souls are called away from their sorrows by present business, or diverted by present pleasure; but all these avocations and amusements will forsake us at once when we drop this mortal tabernacle: we must enter alone into the world of spirits and live without them there.

Whatsoever agonies or terrors, or huge distresses, we may meet with in that unknown region, we shall have none of these sensible enjoyments to soften and allay them; no drop of sweetness to mix with that bitter cup, no scenes of gaiety and merriment to relieve the gloom of that utter darkness, or to sooth

the anguish of that eternal heart-ache. O, take heed, my friends, that your souls do not live too much on any of the satisfactions of this life, that your affections be not set upon them in too high a degree, that you make them not your idols and your chief good, lest you be left helpless and miserable under everlasting disappointments, for they cannot follow you into the world of souls; they are the things of time, and they have no place in eternity. Read what caution the apostle Paul gives us in our converse with the dearest comforts of life; 1 Cor. vii. 29. The time is short; and let those who have the largest affluence of temporal blessings, who have the nearest and kindest relatives, and the most endeared friendships, be mortified to them, and be in some sense "as though they had them not," for ye cannot possess them long. St. Peter joins in the same sort of advice, 1 Pet. iv. 7. "The end of all things is at hand, therefore be ye sober;" be ye moderate in every enjoyment on earth, and prepare to part with them all when the angel pronounces that "Time shall be no longer:" his sentence puts an effectual period to every joy in this life, and to every hope that is not eternal.

Thus we have taken a brief survey of what are the solemn and awful thoughts relating to such mortal creatures in general, which are contained in this voice or sentence of the angel, that time shall be no longer.

In the second place, let us proceed farther, and inquire a little what are those terrors which will attend sinners, impenitent sinners, at the end of time.

1. A dreadful account must be given of all this lost and wasted time. When the Judge shall ascend his throne in the air, and all the sons and daughters of Adam are brought before him, the grand inquiry will be, What have you done with all the time of life in yonder world? You spent

thirty or forty years there, or perhaps seventy or eighty, and I gave you this time with a thousand opportunities and means of grace and salvation; what have you done with them all? How many sabbaths did I afford you? How many sermons have you heard? How many seasons did I give you for prayer, and retirement, and converse with God and your own souls? Did you improve time well? Did you pray? Did you converse with your souls and with God? Or did you suffer time to slide away in a thousand impertinences, and neglect the one thing necessary?

2. A fruitless and bitter mourning for the waste and abuse of time will be another consequence of your folly. Whatsoever satisfaction you may take now in passing time away merrily and without thinking, it must not pass away so for ever. If the approaches of death do not awaken you, yet judgment will do it. Your consciences will be worried with terrible reflections on your foolish conduct.

O could we but hear the complaints of the souls in hell, what multitudes of them would be found groaning out this dismal note, How hath my time been lost in vanity, and my soul is now lost for ever in distress! How might I have shone among the saints in heaven, had I wisely improved the time which was given me on earth, given me on purpose to prepare for death and heaven! Then they will for ever curse themselves, and call themselves eternal fools, for hearkening to the temptations of flesh and sense, which wasted their time, and deprived them of eternal treasures.

3. Another of the terrors which will seize upon impenitent sinners at the end of time will be endless despair of the recovery of lost time, and of those blessings whose hope is for ever lost with it. There are blessings offered to sinful miserable men in time which will never be offered in eternity, nor

put within their reach for ever. The gospel hath no calls, no invitations, no encouragements, no promises for the dead, who have lost and wasted their time, and are perished without hope. The region of sorrows, whither the Judge shall drive impenitent sinners, is a dark and desolate place, where light and hope can never come: but fruitless repentance with horrors and agonies of soul, and doleful despair, reign through that world without one gleam of light or hope, or one moment of intermission. Then will despairing sinners gnaw their tongues for anguish of heart, and curse themselves with long execrations, and curse their fellow-sinners who assisted them to waste their time, and to ruin their souls.

4. The last terror I shall mention which will attend sinners at the end of time is, an eternal suffering of all the painful and dismal consequences of lost and wasted time. Not one smile from the face of God for ever, not one glimpse of love or mercy in his countenance, not one word of grace from Jesus Christ, who was once the chief messenger of the grace of God, not one favourable regard from all the holy saints and angels; but the fire and brimstone burn without end, and the smoke of this their torment will ascend for ever and ever before the throne of God and the Lamb.

Who knows how keen and bitter will be the agonies of an awakened conscience, and the vengeance of a provoked God in that world of misery! How will you cry out, O what a wretch have I been to renounce all the advices of a compassionate father, when he would have persuaded me to improve the time of youth and health! Alas, I turned a deaf ear to his advice, and now time is lost, and my hopes of mercy for ever perished. How have I treated with ridicule, among my vain companions, the compassionate and pious counsels of my aged parents who laboured for my salvation! How have

I scorned the tender admonitions of a mother, and wasted that time in sinning and sensuality which should have been spent in prayer and devotion! And God turns a deaf ear to my cries now, and is regardless of all my groanings. This sort of anguish of spirit, with loud and cutting complaints, would destroy life itself, and these inward terrors would sting their souls to death, if there could be any such thing as dying there. Such sighs and sobs and bitter agonies would break their hearts and dissolve their being, if the heart could break, or the being could be dissolved: but immortality is their dreadful portion, immortality of sorrows to punish their wicked and wilful abuse of time and that waste of the means of grace they were guilty of in their mortal state.

I proceed in the last place to consider what reflections may be made on this discourse, or what are some of the profitable lessons to be learnt from it.

Refl. 1. We may learn with great evidence the inestimable worth and value of time, and particularly to those who are not prepared for eternity. Every hour you live is an hour longer given you to prepare for dying, and to save a soul. If you were but apprized of the worth of your own souls, you would better know the worth of days and hours, and of every passing moment; for they are given to secure your immortal interest, and save a soul from everlasting misery. And you would be zealous and importunate in the prayer of Moses, the man of God, upon a meditation of the shortness of life. Ps. xc. 12. "So teach us to number our days, as to apply our hearts to wisdom;" that is, so teach us to consider how few and uncertain our days are, that we may be truly wise in preparing for the end of them.

It is a matter of vast importance to be ever ready

for the end of time, ready to hear this awful sentence confirmed with the oath of the glorious angel, that "Time shall be no longer." The terrors or the comforts of a dying bed depend upon it: the solemn and decisive voice of judgment depends upon it: the joys and the sorrows of a long eternity depend upon it: go now, careless sinners, and in the view of such things as these, go and trifle away time as you have done before; time, that invaluable treasure: go and venture the loss of your souls, and the hopes of heaven and your eternal happiness, in wasting away the remnant hours or moments of life; but remember the awful voice of the angel is hastening toward you, and the sound is just breaking in upon you, that "Time shall be no longer."

Refl. 2. A due sense of time hastening to its period will furnish us with perpetual new occasions of holy meditation.

Do I observe the declining day and the setting sun sinking into darkness? so declines the day of life, the hours of labour, and the season of grace: O may I finish my appointed work with honour ere the light is fled! may I improve the shining hours of grace, ere the shadows of the evening overtake me, and my time of working is no more.

Do I see the moon gliding along through midnight, and fulfilling her stages in the dusky sky? This planet also is measuring out my life, and bringing the number of my months to their end. May I be prepared to take leave of the sun and moon, and bid adieu to these visible heavens, and all the twinkling glories of them! These are all but the measurers of my time, and hasten me on towards eternity.

Am I walking in a garden and stand still to observe the slow motion of the shadow upon a dial there? It passes over the hour-lines with an imperceptible progress, yet it will touch the last line of day-light shortly: so my hours and my moments move onward

with a silent pace; but they will arrive with certainty at the last limit, how heedless soever I am of their motion, and how thoughtless soever I may be of the improvement of time, or of the end of it.

Does a new year commence, and the first morning of it dawn upon me? Let me remember that the last year was finished, and gone over my head, in order to make way for the entrance of the present. I have one year the less to travel through this world, and to fulfil the various services of a travelling state: may my diligence in duty be double since the number of my appointed years is diminished.

Do I find a new birth-day in my survey of the calendar, the day wherein I entered upon the stage of mortality, and was born into this world of sins, frailties and sorrows, in order to my probation for a better state? Blessed Lord, how much have I spent already of this mortal life, this season of my probation, and how little am I prepared for that happier world? how unready for my dying moment? I am hastening hourly to the end of the life of man which began at my nativity; am I yet born of God? Have I begun the life of a saint? Am I prepared for that awful day which shall determine the number of my months on earth? Am I fit to be born into the world of spirits through the strait gate of death? Am I renewed in all the powers of my nature, and made meet to enter into that unseen world, where there shall be no more of these revolutions of days and years, but one eternal day fills up all the space with divine pleasure, or one eternal night with long and deplorable distress and darkness?

When I see a friend expiring, or the corpse of my neighbour conveyed to the grave, alas! their months and minutes are all determined, and the seasons of their trial are finished for ever: they are gone to their eternal home, and the estate of their souls is fixed unchangeably: the angel that has sworn their

"time shall be no longer," has concluded their hopes, or has finished their fears, and according to the rules of righteous judgment, has dediced their misery or happiness for a long immortality. Take this warning, O my soul, and think of thy own removal.

Are we standing in the church-yard, paying the last honours to the relics of our friends? what a number of hillocks of death appear all around us! what are the tomb-stones but memorials of the inhabitants of that town, to inform us of the period of all their lives, and to point out the day when it was said to each of them, your "time shall be no longer." O may I readily learn this important lesson, that my turn is hastening too; such a little hillock shall shortly arise for me on some unknown spot of ground; it shall cover this flesh and these bones of mine in darkness, and shall hide them from the light of the sun, and from the sight of man, till the heavens be no more.

Perhaps some kind surviving friend may engrave my name with the number of my days upon a plain funeral stone, without ornament, and below envy; there shall my tomb stand among the rest as a fresh monument of the frailty of nature and the end of time. It is possible some friendly foot may now and then visit the place of my repose, and some tender eye may bedew the cold memorial with a tear: one or another of my old acquaintance may possibly attend there to learn the silent lecture of mortality from my grave-stone, which my lips are now preaching aloud to the world: and if love and sorrow should reach so far, perhaps while his soul is melting in his eyelids, and his voice scarce finds an utterance, he will point with his finger and show his companion the month and the day of my decease. O that solemn, that awful day, which shall finish my appointed time on earth, and put a full period to all the designs

of my heart, and all the labours of my tongue and pen!

Think, O my soul, that while friends or strangers are engaged on that spot, and reading the day of thy departure hence, thou wilt be fixed under a decisive and unchangeable sentence, rejoicing in the rewards of time well-improved, or suffering the long sorrows which shall attend the abuse of it, in an unknown world of happiness or misery.

Refl. 3. We may learn from this discourse the stupid folly and madness of those who are terribly afraid of the end of time whensoever they think of it, and yet they know not what to do with their time as it runs off daily and hourly. They find their souls unready for death, and yet they live from year to year without any farther preparation for dying: they waste away their hours of leisure in mere trifling, they lose their seasons of grace, their means and opportunities of salvation in a thoughtless and shameful manner, as though they had no business to employ them in; they live as though they had nothing to do with all their time but to eat and drink, and be easy and merry. From the rising to the setting sun you find them still in pursuit of impertinencies; they waste God's sacred time as well as their own, either in a lazy, indolent, and careless humour, or in following after vanity, sin and madness, while the end of time is hastening upon them.

What multitudes are there of the race of Adam, both in higher and in lower ranks, who are ever complaining they want leisure: and when they have a release from business for one day or one hour, they hardly know what to do with that idle day, or how to lay out one of the hours of it, for any valuable purpose? Those in higher station and richer circumstances have most of their time at their own command and disposal: but by their actual disposal of it you plainly see they know not what it is good for, nor

what use to make of it; they are quite at a loss how to get rid of this tedious thing called time, which lies daily as a burden on their hands. Indeed, if their head ache, or their face grow pale, and a physician feel their pulse or look wishfully on their countenance; and especially if he should shake his head, or tell them his fears, that they will not hold out long, what surprise of soul, what agonies and terrors seize them on a sudden, for fear of the end of time! for they are conscious how unfit they are for eternity: yet when the pain vanishes, and they feel health again, they are as much at a loss as ever what to do with the remnant of life.

O the painful and unhappy ignorance of the sons and daughters of men, that are sent hither on a trial for eternity, and yet know not how to pass away time? they know not how to wear out life and get soon enough to the end of the day; they doze their hours away, or saunter from place to place, without any design or meaning: they inquire of every one they meet, what they shall do to kill time, (as the French phrase is,) because they cannot spend it fast enough; they are perpetually calling in the assistance of others to laugh or sport, or trifle with them, and to help them off with this dead weight of time, while at the same moment, if you do but mention the end of time, they are dreadfully afraid of coming near it. What folly and distraction is that? What sottish inconsistency is found in the heart and practice of sinful man? Eccles. ix. 3. "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil: madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go down to the dead."

O that these loiterers would once consider that time loiters not; days and hours, months and years loiter not; each of them flies away with swiftest wing, as fast as succession admits of, and bears them onward to the goal of eternity. If they delay and linger among toys and shadows, time knows no delay; and

they will one day learn by bitter experience what substantial, important, and eternal blessings, they have lost by their criminal and shameful waste of time. The apostle Peter assures them, 2 Pet. ii. 3, Though they slumber and sleep in a lethargy of sin, so that you cannot awaken them, yet "their judgment lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." The awful moment is hasting upon them which shall teach them terribly the true value of time; then they would give all the golden pleasures, and the riches and grandeur of this world, to purchase one short day more or one hour of time, wherein they might repent and return to God, and get within the reach of hope and salvation: but time and salvation and hope are all vanished and fled and gone out of their reach for ever.

Refl. IV. Learn from such meditations as these the rich mercy of God, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in giving us so long a warning before he swears that time shall be no more. Every stroke of sickness is a warning-piece that life is coming to its period: every death amongst our friends and acquaintance, is another tender and painful admonition that our death also is at hand: the end of every week and every dawning sabbath, is another warning; every sermon we hear of the shortness of time and the uncertainty of life, is a fresh intimation, that the great angel will shortly pronounce a period upon all our time. How inexcusable shall we be if we turn the deaf ear to all these warnings! St. Peter advises us to "count the long-suffering of the Lord for salvation," 2 Pet. iii. 15, and to secure our eternal safety, and our escape from hell during the season of his lengthened grace.

Alas! how long has Jesus and his mercy, and his gospel, waited on you, before you began to think of the things of your everlasting peace? And if you are now solemnly awakened, yet how long has he

waited on you with fresh admonitions, and with special providences, with mercies and judgments, with promises and invitations of grace, with threatenings and words of terror, and with the whispers and advices of his own Spirit, since you began to see your danger? And after all have you yet sincerely repented of sin? have you yet received the offered grace? have you given up yourselves to the Lord and laid hold of his salvation? 2 Cor. vi. 2. "This is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation: to-day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Heb. iii. 7, 8, &c. It is never said, through all the Bible, that "to-morrow is the day of grace, or to-morrow is the time of acceptance;" it is the present hour only that is offered. Every day and every hour is a mercy of unknown importance to sinful men. It is a mercy, O sinners, that you awaked not this morning in hell, and that you were not fixed without remedy beyond the reach of hope and mercy.

Refl. V. Learn from this discourse what a very useful practice it would be to set ourselves often before-hand as at the end of time, to imagine ourselves just under the sound of the voice of this mighty angel, or at the tribunal of Christ, and to call our souls to a solemn account in what manner we have passed away all our leisure time hitherto: I mean, all that time which hath not been laid out in the necessities of the natural life for its support, and its needful refreshment, or in the due and proper employments of the civil life: both these are allowed and required by the God of nature, and the God of providence, who governs the world; but what hast thou done, O man; O woman, what hast thou done with all the hours of leisure, which might have been laid out on far better employments, and to far nobler purposes! Give me leave to enter into particulars a little, for generals do but seldom convince the mind, or awaken the conscience, or affect the heart.

1. Have you not slumbered or squandered away too much time without any useful purpose or design at all? How many are there, that when they have morning hours on their hands, can pass them off on their beds, and lose and forget time in "a little more sleep, and a little more slumber;" a few impertinences with breakfast and dressing, wear out the morning without God. And how many afternoon and evening hours are worn away in such sauntering idleness as I have described, that when the night comes they cannot review one half hour's useful work, from the dawn of the morning to the hour of rest. Time is gone and vanished, and as they knew not what to do with it while it was present, so now it is past, they know not what they have done with it: they keep no account of it, and are never prepared to come to a reckoning: but will the great Judge of all take this for an answer to such a solemn inquiry?

2. Have you never laid out much more time than was needful in "recreations and pleasures of sense?" Recreations are not unlawful, so far as they are necessary and proper to relieve the fatigue of the spirits, when they are tired with business or labour, and to prepare for new labours and new businesses: but have we not followed sports without due limitation? Hath not some of that very time been spent in them which should have been laid out in preparing for death and eternity, and in seeking things of far higher importance?

3. Have you not wasted too much time in your frequent clubs, and what you call good company, and in places of public resort? Has not the tavern or the coffee-house or the ale-house, seen and known you from hour to hour for a whole evening, and that sometimes before the trade or labours of the day should have been ended? And when your Bible and your closet, or the devotion of your family, have sometimes called upon your conscience, have you not turned the deaf ear to them all?

4. Have not useless and impertinent visits been made to no good purpose, or been prolonged beyond all necessity or improvement? when your conversation runs low even to the dregs, and both you and your friends have been at a loss what to say next, and knew not how to fill up the time, yet the visit must go on and time shall be wasted. Sometimes the wind and the weather, and twenty insignificancies, or (what is much worse) scandal of persons or families have come in to your relief, that there might not be too long a silence; but not one word of God or goodness could find room to enter in and relieve the dull hour. Is none of this time ever to be accounted for? and will it sound well in the ears of the great Judge? We ran to these sorry topics, these slanderous and backbiting stories, because we could not tell what to talk of, and we knew not how to spend our time.

5. Have you not been guilty of frequent and even perpetual delays or neglects of your proper necessary business in the civil life, or in the solemn duties of religion," by busying yourselves in some other needless thing under this pretence, It is time enough yet?

Have you learnt that important and eternal rule of prudence, "Never delay till to-morrow what may be done to-day; never put off till the next hour what may be done in this?" Have you not often experienced your own disappointment and folly by these delays? and yet have you ever so repented as to learn to mend them? Solomon tells us, Eccles. iii. 1, "There is a time for every purpose and every work under the sun:" a proper and agreeable time for every lawful work of nature and life; and it is the business and care of a wise man to do proper work in proper time; but when we have let slip the proper season, how often have we been utterly disappointed? have we not sustained great inconvenience? and sometimes it has so happened that we could never do that work or

business at all, because another proper season for it has never offered; time hath been no more. Felix put off his discourse with Paul about the faith of Christ and righteousness and judgment to come, to a more convenient time, which probably never came. Acts xxiv. 25. And the word of God teaches us, that the angel in my text is ready to swear, if we neglect our salvation in the present day of grace, that time shall be no longer.

Here permit me to put in a short word to those who have lost much time already.

O, my friends, begin now to do what in you lies to regain it by double diligence in the matters of your salvation, lest the voice of the archangel should finish your time of trial, and call you to judgment before you are prepared.

What here lies before you for this double improvement, God only knows: the remnant of the measure of your days is with him, and every evening the number is diminished: let not the rising sun upbraid you with continual negligence. Remember your former abuses of hours and months and years, in folly and sin, or at best in vanity and trifling: let these thoughts of your past conduct lie with such an effectual weight on your hearts as to keep you ever vigorous in present duty. Since you have been so lazy and loitering in your Christian race in time past, take larger steps daily, and stretch all the powers of your souls to hasten towards the crown and the prize. Hearken to the voice of God in his word with stronger attention and zeal to profit; pray to a long-suffering God with double fervency; cry aloud and give him no rest, till your sinful soul is changed into penitence and renewed to holiness, till you have some good evidences of your sincere love to God and unfeigned faith in his Son Jesus. Never be satisfied till you are come to a well grounded hope through grace, that God is your friend, your reconciled

Father, that when days and months are no more, you may enter into the region of everlasting light and peace.

But I proceed to the last general remark. Learn the unspeakable happiness of those who have improved time well, and who wait for the end of time with Christian hope. They are not afraid, or at least they need not be afraid of the sentence nor the oath of this mighty angel, when he lifts up his hand to heaven and swears with a loud voice, there shall be time no more.

O blessed creatures, who have so happily improved the time of life and day of grace, as to obtain the restoration of the image of God in some degree on their souls, and to recover the favour of God through the gospel of Christ, for which end time was bestowed upon them; they have reviewed their follies with shame in the land of hope; they have mourned and repented of sin ere the season of repentance was past, and are become new creatures, and their lips and their lives declare the divine change. They have made preparation for death, for which purpose life and time were given. Happy souls indeed, who have so valued time as not to let it run off in trifles, but have obtained treasures more valuable than that time which is gone, even the riches of the covenant of grace, and the hopes of an eternal inheritance in glory.

Happy such souls indeed when time is no more with them! their happiness begins when the duration of their mortal life is finished. Let us survey this their happiness in a few particulars.

The time of their darknesses and difficulties is no longer: the time of painful ignorance and error is come to an end: you shall wander no more in mistake and folly; you shall behold all things in the light of God, and see him face to face, who is the original beauty and the eternal truth. You shall see him

without vails and shadows, without the reflecting glass of his word and ordinances, which at best give us but a faint glimpse of him, either in his nature or wisdom, his power or goodness. You shall see him in himself, and in his Son Jesus, the brightest and fairest image of the Father, and "shall know him as you are known," 1 Cor. xiii. 10, 12.

There is no more time for temptation and danger: when once you are got beyond the limits of this visible world, and all the enticing objects of flesh and sense, there shall be no more hazard of your salvation, no more doubting and distressing fears about your interest in your Father's love, or in the salvation of his beloved Son. There is no more time nor place for sin to inhabit in you; the lease of its habitation in your mortal body must end, when the body itself falls into the dust: you shall feel no more of its powerful and defiling operations either in heart or life for ever.

The time of conflict with your spiritual adversaries is no longer. There is no more warfare betwixt the flesh and spirit, no more combat with the world and the devil, who by a thousand ways have attempted to deceive you and to bear you off from your heavenly hope. Your warfare is accomplished, your victory is complete; you are made overcomers through him that has loved you. Death is the last enemy to be overcome; the sting of it is already taken away, and you have now finished the conquest, and are assured of the crown. 1 Cor. xv. 56, 57.

The time of your distance and absence from God is no more: the time of coldness and indifference and the fearful danger of backsliding is no more; you shall be made as "pillars in the temple of your God, and shall go no more out:" he shall love you like a God, and kindle the flames of your love to so intense a degree as is only known to angels and to the spirits of the just made perfect.

There is no more time for you to be vexed with

the "society of sinful creatures:" your spirits within you shall be no more ruffled and disquieted with the teazing conversation of the wicked, nor shall you be interrupted in your holy and heavenly exercises by any of the enemies of God and his grace.

The time of your painful labours and sufferings is no more. Rev. xiv. 13: "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, for they rest from all their labours" that carry toil or fatigue with them: there shall be no more complaints nor groans, no sorrow nor crying: the springs of grief are for ever dried up, neither shall there be any more pain in the flesh or the spirit. "God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes," and death shall be no more, Rev. xxi. 4.

"It is finished," said our blessed Lord on the cross: it is finished, may every one of his followers say at the hour of death and at the end of time: my sins and follies, my distresses and my sufferings are finished for ever, and the mighty angel swears to it that the time of these evils is no longer: they are vanished, and shall never return. O happy souls, who have been so wise to count the short and uncertain number of your days on earth, as to make an early provision for a removal to heaven. Blessed are you above all the powers of present thought and language. Days and months and years, and all these short and painful periods of time, shall be swallowed up in a long and blissful eternity; the stream of time which has run between the banks of this immortal life, and bore you along amidst many dangerous rocks of temptation, fear and sorrow, shall launch you out into the ocean of pleasures which have no period: those felicities must be everlasting, for duration has no limit there; time with all its measures shall be no more. Amen.

DISCOURSE II.

THE WATCHFUL CHRISTIAN DYING IN PEACE.

A FUNERAL SERMON

ON THE DEATH OF MRS. SARAH ABNEY.

It is an awful providence which hath lately removed from among us a young person well known to most of you, whose agreeable temper and conduct had gained the esteem of all her acquaintance, whose constitution of body, together with the furniture of her mind and circumstances in the world, concurred to promise many future years of life and usefulness. But all that is born of the race of man is frail and mortal, and all that is done by the hand of God is wise and holy. We mourn, and we submit in silence. Yet the providence hath a voice in it, and the friends of the deceased are very solicitous that such an unexpected and instructive appearance of death might be religiously improved to the benefit of the living. For this end I am desired to entertain you at present with some meditations on those words of our Saviour, which you read in

LUKE XII. 37.

Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching.

Various and well-chosen are those parables, whereby our Saviour gave warning to his disci-

ples, that when he was departed from this world, they should ever be upon their guard, and always in a readiness to receive him at his return; because he would come on a sudden and in such an hour as they thought not, to demand an account of their behaviour, and to distribute his recompenses according to their works. There are two of these parables in this chapter; but to enter into a detail of all the particular metaphors which relate to this one whence I have borrowed my text, would be too tedious here, and would spend too much of the present hour. Without any longer preface, therefore, I shall apply myself to improve the words to our spiritual profit in the following method:

I. I shall inquire what is meant by the coming of Christ in the text, and how it may be properly applied to our present purpose, or the hour of death.

II. I shall consider what is implied in the watchfulness which our Saviour recommends.

III. I shall propose some considerations which will discover the blessedness of a watchful soul in a dying hour.

IV. I shall add some practical remarks.

First, Let us inquire what is meant by the coming of Christ in my text.

The coming of Christ in some of these parables, may have reference to his speedy appearance in the course of his providence in that very age, to judge and punish the Jewish nation, to destroy their city and put an end to their church and state, for their many heinous iniquities, and the most provoking

crime of rejecting and crucifying the Son of God. But these words, in their supreme and most important sense, always point to the glorious appearance of Christ at the last day, when he shall come to shut up all the scenes of this frail life, to put an end to the present world, to finish all the works of this mortal state, and to decide and determine the eternal states of all mankind by the general judgment.

Yet Christ comes to each of us in "the hour of death also, for he hath the keys of hell and of death," or of the invisible world, Rev. i. 18. It is he who appoints the very moment when the soul shall be dismissed from this flesh; he opens the doors of the grave for the dying body, and he is Lord of the world of spirits, and lets in new inhabitants every minute into those unseen regions of immortal sorrow or immortal peace.

And as Christ may be said to come to us by the message or summons of death, so the many solemn writings and commands of watchfulness which attend these parables of Christ have been usually and with good reason applied to the hour of death also, for when the Lord comes to shut up the scene of each of our lives, our works are then finished, our last day is come, and the world is then at an end with us.

Let it be observed also, that there is a farther parallel between the day of the general judgment and that of our own death: the one will as certainly come as the other, but the time when Christ will come in either of these senses, is unknown to us and uncertain; and it is this which renders the duty of perpetual watchfulness so necessary to all men. The parable assures us that our Lord will certainly come, but whether at the second or third watch, whether at midnight or at cock-crowing, or near the morning, this is all uncertainty; yet whensoever he comes, he expects we should have our loins girded like servants

fit for business, and our lamps burning to attend him at the door, and that we be ready to receive him, as soon as he knocks.

Were the appointed hour of judgment or of death made known to us for months or years before-hand, we should be ready to think constant watchfulness a very needless thing. Mankind would persuade themselves to indulge their foolish and sinful slumbers, and only take care to rub their eyes a little and bestir themselves an hour or two before this awful event: but it is the suddenness and uncertainty of the coming of Christ to all mankind, for either of these purposes, that extends the charge of watchfulness to all men as well as to the apostles, Mark xiii. 37, and that calls upon us aloud to keep our souls ever awake, lest (as our Lord there expresses it) "lest, coming suddenly, he should find us sleeping." And remember this, that if we are unprepared to meet the Lord at death, we can never be ready when he comes to judgment: peace and blessedness attend the watchful Christian whensoever his Lord cometh. "Blessed is that servant, whom, when his Lord cometh, he shall find watching." This leads me to the second general head.

Secondly, What is implied in watchfulness.

Answer. In general it is opposed to sleeping, as I have already hinted, in Mark xiii. 35, 36. And in the language of scripture as well as in common speech, sleep and slumbering denote an unpreparedness to receive whatever comes, for this is the case with those who are asleep: on the other hand, watchfulness is a preparation and readiness for every event, and so it is expressed in some of these parables, ver. 40: "Be ye therefore ready." But to enter into a few particulars.

I. There is a sleep of death, Psalm xiii. 3.

Spiritual death as well as natural is sometimes called a sleep. Such is the case of a soul "dead in trespasses and sins," Eph. v. 14. Compared with ii. 1. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

Watchfulness therefore implies life, a principle of spiritual life in the soul: surely those who are dead in sins are not prepared to receive their Lord: he is a perfect stranger to them, they know him not, they love him not, they obey him not; and a terrible stranger he will be if he comes upon them before they are awake. But those who are awakened by divine grace into a spiritual life, have seen something of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, they are acquainted with their Lord, they love him, and have some degree of preparation to meet their Saviour when he summons them to leave this world. This is therefore a matter of highest consequence, that we awake from a state of sin and death, that we be made alive to God, begin the Christian life and set upon religion in good earnest, according to the rules of the gospel, before Christ calls us away. It is only this divine life begun in us that can secure us from eternal death: though even Christians may be found slumbering in other respects, and expose themselves to painful evils, if that hour surprise them at unawares.

2. There is a sleep of indolence and thoughtlessness: when a man is insensible of his own circumstances and too careless of the things which most concern him, we say the man is asleep. Such a sleep seems to be upon the church of Israel, Isa. xxix. 10, "a spirit of deep sleep," when the law which contained the great things of God and their salvation was to them as a sealed book, they read it not, their eyes were closed, their spiritual senses were bound up. Many a Christian who hath been raised from a death in sin has been seized with this criminal slumber, and has had the image of death come again

upon him: he has grown too careless and unconcerned about his most important and eternal affairs, and in this temper he hardly knows what his state is towards God, nor keeps up a lively sense or notice of divine and eternal things upon his spirit.

Watchfulness in opposition to this sleep, implies a holy solicitude and diligence to know our own spiritual state; a consciousness of what we are; a keeping all the spiritual senses in proper exercise, and maintaining a lively perception of divine things. It implies an acute, painful sense of indwelling sin, and the irregular propensities of the heart, a delightful relish of heavenly objects, frequent thoughts of death and eternity, constant waiting for those awful events, with a quick apprehension and resentment of all things that help or hinder the spiritual life. This is the character of a wakeful Christian, and such a one is ready to receive his returning Lord.

3. There is a sleep of security and foolish peace, when a person is not apprehensive of imminent danger, and is much unguarded against it. Such was the sleep of Jonah in the storm, of Samson on the lap of Delilah when the Philistines were upon him, and of the disciples, when Judas and the band of soldiers were just ready to seize their Master. This is the case of many a slumbering Christian; he is not upon his guard against his inward lusts and passions, nor against those outward temptations and perils to which he is continually exposed while he dwells in flesh and blood.

Watchfulness in this respect is when a Christian hath his eyes open and turns them round on every side to foresee approaching evil and prevent it; when he is prepared for every assault of every adversary, whether sin or the world, whether death or the devil; he hath his spiritual armour girt upon him, and is ready for the combat. He is every hour guarding against the powers of the flesh, and watching against

its allurements and attractions, lest he be defiled thereby and unfit to meet his returning Lord: he is daily loosening his heart from all sensual attachments, and weaning himself from the world and creatures, because he knows he must quickly take his long farewell, and part with them all at the call and appointment of his great Master. He is like a sentinel upon his watch-tower, ever awake, because dangers stand thick around him.

4. There is a sleep of sloth and inactivity. Prov. xix. 15: "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep." "A little more sleep, a little more slumber," saith the lazy Christian, who "turns upon his bed, as the door upon its hinges," and makes no progress or advance in his way to heaven. We are sleepy Christians when we do little for God or our own souls in comparison of the vast work and important varieties of duty that lie upon us! when our zeal is cold, and our efforts of service slight and feeble; when the light of grace shines so dim and the spark of holiness is so covered with ashes, that it is hard to say whether it burn or no. As in natural things so in spiritual, it is a difficult matter sometimes to distinguish between a dead man and a lethargic sleeper.

Watchfulness in opposition to this slumber, is a lively and vigorous exercise of every grace, and a diligent attendance on every duty, both towards God and man, a constant converse with heaven by daily devotion, an active zeal for God in the world, a steady faith in the promises, a joyful hope of heavenly blessedness, a longing expectation of the returning Saviour, which makes the soul stretch out the wings of desire and joy, as though it were going forth to meet him. This is the meaning of the apostle Peter's expression, 2 Pet. iii. 12: "Looking for, and hasting to the coming of the day of God."

Put all these things together now, and they make up the character of a watchful Christian: he is awake

from the sleep of death, and made spiritually alive; he hath the work of vital religion begun in his heart.

He is awake from the sleep of thoughtlessness and indolence, he is solicitous to know his own state, and hath good hope through grace; he lives in the view of heavenly things, and keeps his eye open to future and eternal glories.

He is awake from the sleep of security, he is upon his guard against every danger, and ready to receive every alarm.

He is awake from the sleep of slothfulness, and is active in the pursuit of the glory of his God, and his own eternal interest, and still pressing towards the mark to obtain the prize. This is the soul that is ready to meet a returning Saviour, and to receive his Lord when he comes, either at the hour of death, or to the general judgment.

Thirdly, Let me propose some special considerations which discover the blessedness of the watchful Christian at the hour of death.

1. Consideration. That moment dispossesses us of every enjoyment of flesh and blood, and divides us from the commerce of this visible world; but the wakeful Christian is happy, for he is ready to be thus divided and dispossessed. Death breaks the band at once between us and all the sensible things round about us, by dissolving the frame of this body which had united us to them; and the watchful saint is content to have that bond broken, these unions dissolved. His heart and soul are not torn away from the dear delights of this mortal state with that pain, anguish and horror that attend the sinner when death summons him off the stage, and divides him from his fleshly idols. The Christian hath been untying his heart by degrees from the dearest delights of sense, and disengaging it from all that is not immortal: with holy pleasure he can bid farewell to sun, moon

and stars, and to all things which their light can show him; for he is going to a world where the Sun of righteousness ever shines in unclouded glory, and discovers such sights as are infinitely superior to all that the eyes of flesh can behold: he can part with friends and kindred with a composed spirit, for he is going to meet better friends and diviner kindred, as we shall show immediately: he can leave his dying flesh behind him, and commit it to the dust in joyful hope of the great rising day, and he hath a better mansion at present provided for him on high in his Father's house, while he lives far separate from all earthly dwellings. 2 Cor. v. 1: "We know that if this earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

2. Consideration. The moment of death finishes our state of trial, and fixes us unchangeably in the state of sin or holiness, in which we are then found: and blessed is the watchful Christian, for he is prepared to have his trial thus ended, and his state thus fixed and made unchangeable. "As the tree falls, so it lies," Eccles. xi. 10. Whether to the north or the south: as the soul parts from the body, so it remains, whether fitted for heaven or hell. It is therefore a matter of the last importance to be prepared and ready for such an eternal sentence and unchangeable determination. Were any of us to be surprised some moment this day, and forced to continue all our lives in that very posture of body in which we are then found, should we not be awake, and keep ourselves in the most natural and easy gestures all that day, lest we be seized at once and fixed in some distorted, painful, and uneasy situation all our months and years to come? or if we were to be bound down to one single thought or passion all the remnant of our life in which we were found in any uncertain minute in this hour, should we not watch

with utmost care, and guard against every unpleasing thought, and every fretful and vexing passion, lest it should be fixed upon us till we die?

Now this is the case at death: the almighty voice of God then pronounces, "He that is unclean and unholy, must for ever be unholy and unclean; but he that is righteous, let him be righteous still, and he that is holy, shall be for ever holy." Rev. xxii. 11. I will not precisely determine that this is the sense of that text; yet since the apostle speaks there concerning the coming of Christ, it may be very applicable to the present case. Now how dreadful soever this thought is to a guilty sinful creature, it is no terror to a wakeful Christian: he is ready to have these words pronounced from heaven, for they will establish him in eternal holiness and eternal peace: he hath endeavoured to secure for himself an interest in the love of God through the faith and love of Jesus the blessed Mediator, and at death he is fixed for ever in their love. He hath loved God in time, and in this visible world, and there is nothing in all the unseen worlds, nothing through all the ages of eternity shall ever separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. The moment of death hath fixed him for ever a holy and beloved soul, beyond the power of creatures to change his temper or his state. This is the blessedness of the watchful Christian.

3. Consideration. Death sets us in a more immediate and sensible manner in the presence of God, a glorious and holy God, God the Judge of all; and blessed is the watchful Christian, for he is willing to stand before this God, to be brought into his presence: this is what he hath longed and prayed for, to be for ever with God. It is the blessedness that he hath sought with incessant labours and tears, with holy diligence and daily devotion, and blessed is the pure in heart who hath watched against the pollutions of the world, "for he shall see God." Matt. v 8

It is certain that when the soul departs from the body, "it returns to God who gave it," Eccles. xii. 7. And probably to God as a Judge too, Heb. ix. 27. "After death the judgment." There is some sort of determination of the state of each single person at death before the great and general judgment-day, because that day is appointed rather for the public vindication of the equity of God in his distribution of rewards and punishments, and is particularly put into the hands of our Lord Jesus: now since the separate soul returns to God who gave it, it is of vast importance that we be then prepared to come before him.

Some of us here would be mightily afraid of appearing before a prince, or a great and honourable person, in an undress; but for our souls in a naked state, or in a garment of sinful pollution, to be surprised by the great and holy God, to be set on a sudden in his presence, what terror is contained in this thought! Now the "watchful Christian hath this blessedness," that he is washed from his defilements in the blood of the Lamb, "he is clothed with the robe of righteousness and the garments of salvation." Isa. lxi. 10. He is prepared to appear before a God of infinite holiness without terror, for he is made like him, he bears his image, he appears as one of his children, and he is not afraid to see his Father.

However some commentators may confine and impoverish the sense of David in the end of the seventeenth Psalm, yet I am persuaded the Spirit of God in him designed to express his faith and joy, either at the hour of death, or in the morning of the resurrection: "I shall behold thy face in righteousness, I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness:" when the psalmist had described what were the satisfactions of the men of this world in death, ver. 14, (viz.) that they had filled their houses with children and leave their substance or riches to them, he

then declares what was his support and hope in his dying hour: as for me, saith he, I have other views. I am not afraid, O my God, to appear before thee in the other world; for I shall see thy face, not as a criminal, but as a person approved and accepted, and righteous in thy sight: I shall awake from this world of dreams and shadows into thy complete image and perfect holiness; or I shall awake from the dust of death, and shall be fully satisfied, and rejoice to find myself made so like my God, and to dwell for ever in his presence.

4. Consideration. It is the Lord Jesus Christ that lets the soul out of the body, for he hath the keys of death, and of the unseen world, and blessed is the watchful Christian who waits for the coming of his Lord, for he can meet him gladly when fulfilling this part of his glorious office. He shall be introduced by him into the presence of God his Father, and shall receive most condescending instances of mercy from Christ himself. See the text, Luke xii. 36, 37: "Be ye yourselves like men that wait for the Lord, that when he cometh and knocketh ye may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily, I say to you, he shall gird himself and make them sit down to meat, and come forth to serve them." He shall condescend as it were even below the office of a steward; he shall bring out the heavenly provisions of his Father's house and make them sit down in his kingdom, and give them divine refreshments after their labours; he shall feed them as a shepherd, shall lead them to living fountains of waters, and afford them his presence for ever.

The watchful Christian is blessed indeed when he shall be "absent from the body, and be at once present with the Lord," 2 Cor. v. 8. The Lord Jesus, whom he hath seen by faith in his gospel, whose voice he hath heard in his word and obeyed it, Jesus,

whom he hath touched and tasted in the appointed emblems of his supper on earth, in whom he hath believed through the word of grace, and whom he hath loved before he saw him, shall now receive him into his presence, and the disciple shall rejoice for ever to meet his Lord, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

5. Consideration. At the hour of death we are sent at once into an invisible world, we shall find ourselves in the midst of holy or of unclean spirits; borne away at once into an unknown region and into the midst of unknown inhabitants, the nations of the saved or the crowds of damned souls; and blessed is the watchful Christian, for he is ready to enter into the unseen regions: he knows he shall not be placed among those whose company and whose character he never loved here on earth; his soul shall not be gathered with sinners, nor his dwelling be with the workers of iniquity, but with the saints, the excellent in the earth, in whom was all his delight. Every one when dismissed from the prison of this body must go as the apostles did, when released from the prison at "Jerusalem, must go to their own company," Acts iv. 23. Judas the traitor went to his own place, Acts i. 25. And the watchful Christian will be disposed among "spirits of the just made perfect," he will find himself in that blessed society at his dismission from flesh and blood. Read and see what a glorious society it is, Heb. xii. 22, 23: "To the innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the first-born who are written in heaven, to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant." The apostle says, we are come to them already, that is, by the covenant of grace as administered under the gospel, we are brought into a blessed union with them in spirit and in temper even in this life; we are members of the same body,

we are united to the same head, and made parts of the same household, though we are not yet brought home: but at death we are actually present with them, and dwell and converse among them with holy familiarity, as citizens of the same heavenly Jerusalem, as parts of the same sacred family and at home, as children of the same God, and in their Father's house. The watchful Christian is at once carried into the midst of the blessed world by ministering angels, the world where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob dwell, and made speedy partaker of their blessedness. Luke xvi. 22.

6. Consideration. Death brings with it a most amazing and inconceivable change of all our present circumstances and thoughts, our actions and pursuits, our sensations and enjoyments, I mean all those that relate to this life only, such as eating, drinking, buying, selling, &c. It dislodges us from these bodies, and thereby finishes all those affections, concerns and labours which belong to the body, and sends us into another sort of world whose affairs and concerns are such only as belong to spirits, whether sinful or holy: a most delightful or a most dreadful change! a world of unknown sorrows or unknown happiness! Luke xxiii. 43: "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Luke xvi. 22: "The rich man died, and in hell he lifted up his eyes." And indeed the change is so vast, that comparatively speaking we know not what sorrow or happiness is till this day come. Now it is a very foolish and dangerous thing at best to pass into such an extreme change of states, infinitely worse or infinitely better, while we are asleep and at all uncertainties: what if it should be the miserable state, and we should awake in hell? but "the watchful Christian is blessed, for he is ready for this amazing change." He hath long lived upon it by faith and hope, though he knows not so well what the particular enjoyments of heaven are; and he is well

satisfied that he is prepared for that happy world by God himself; 2 Cor. v. 5: "He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God:" he is well pleased to have his faith changed into sight, and his hope into fruition: he hath been long pained and burdened in this sinful world with the vain trifles, the poor low cares and amusements of it; the sins, and sorrows, and temptations that surround him in it, give him continual disquietudes, and he hath been training up in the school of Christ by devotion and good works for those higher services of heaven. Since he can trust the promises of the gospel, and has had some small foretaste of these pleasures, he knows that the actions and employments, the businesses and joys of the upper world are incomparably superior to any thing here on earth, and free from all the uneasy and defiling circumstances of this life. He is awake to receive this change: he rejoices in his removal from world to world: his vital and active powers are ready for the business of paradise, and he opens his heart to take in the joy.

7. Consideration. Death makes its approaches oftentimes, and seizes us in such a manner as to give no room for prayers or repentance; then the blessedness of the watchful soul appears, that if he is carried out of the world and time in such a surprising way, he is safe for eternity.

Sometimes the messenger of death stops all our thoughts and actions at once by a lethargic stroke, or confounds them all by the delirious ravings of a fever; the light of reason is eclipsed and darkened, the powers of the mind are all obstructed, or the languishings of nature have so enfeebled them, that either we cannot exercise them to any spiritual purposes, or we are forbidden to do it for fear of counterworking the physician, increasing the malady, and hastening our death. Thus we are not capable of making any new preparation for the important work

of dying; we can make use of none of the means of grace, nor do any thing more to secure an interest in the love of God, the salvation of Christ, and the blessings of heaven.

This is a very dismal thought indeed. But the watchful Christian hath this blessedness, that he is fit to receive the sentence of death in any form; nor lethargies, nor deliriums, nor languors of nature can destroy the seeds of grace and religion in the heart, which were sown there in the days of health; nor can any of the formidable attendants of death cancel his former transaction with God and Christ about his immortal concerns. That great and momentous work was done before death appeared or any of its attendants. He was not so unwise as to leave matters of infinite importance at that dreadful hazard: he is not now to begin to seek after a lost God, nor to begin his repentance for past sins: he is not now a stranger at the throne of grace, nor beginning to learn to pray: he is not now commencing his acquaintance with Jesus Christ his Saviour in the midst of a tumult and hurry of thoughts and fears, nor are the works of faith and love and holiness to be now begun. Dreadful work indeed, and infinitely hazardous! to begin to be convinced of sin on the borders of death, and to make our first inquiries after God and heaven upon the very brink of hell! to begin to ask for pardon when he can live in sin no longer; to cry out, Jesus save me, when the waves of the wrath of God are breaking in upon the drowning soul! hopeless condition and extreme wretchedness! to have all the hard work of conversion to go through under the sinkings of feeble nature, and to begin the exercise of virtue and godliness under the wild disorders of reason! what a madness is it to leave our infinite concerns at such a horrible uncertainty!

But these are not thy circumstances, O wakeful Christian; nor was this the case of our young departed

friend, though her distemper soon discomposed her reasoning powers, and gave her very little opportunity to make a present preparation for dying. But she had heard the voice of Christ in his gospel betimes, and awoke to righteousness at his call, that she might be always ready for his summons in death. Religion was her early care, a fear to offend God possessed and governed her thoughts and actions from her childhood, and heavenly things were her youthful choice. She had appeared for some years in the public profession of Christianity, and maintained the practice of godliness in the church and the world; but it began much more early in secret. Her beloved closet and her retiring hours were silent witnesses of her daily converse with God and her Saviour: there she devoted her soul to her Creator betimes, according to the encouragement and rules of the gospel of Christ, and there she found peace and salvation. It was there she made a conscientious recollection of the sermons she heard in public from her tender years, and left behind her these fruits of her memory and her pen, to attest what improvements she gained in knowledge by the ministrations of the word; and her cabinet has now discovered to us another set of memoirs wherein she continually observed what advances she might make in real piety by those weekly seasons of grace.

It was under these influences she maintained a most dutiful and affectionate behaviour to her honoured parents, and with filial fondness mingled with esteem, submission, and reverence, paid her constant regards to the lady her mother in her widowed estate. It was by the united principles of grace and nature, she lived with her youngest sisters in uncommon harmony and friendship, as though one heart and soul animated them all. It was under these influences she ever stood upon her guard amongst all the innocent freedoms of life, and though she did not immure herself

in the walls of a mother's house, but indulged a just curiosity to learn some of the forms of the world, the magnificence of courts and the grandeurs of life, yet she knew how far to appear among them, and when to retire. Nor did she forbid herself all the polite diversions of youth agreeable to her rank; nor did reason or religion, or her superior relatives forbid her; yet she was still awake to secure all that belongs to honour and virtue, nor did she use to venture to the utmost bounds of what sobriety and religion might allow. Danger of guilt stands near the extreme limits of innocence.

Shall I let this paper inform the world with what friendly decency she treated her young companions and acquaintance, how far from indulging the modish liberties of scandal on the absent, how much she hated those scornful and derisive airs which persons on higher ground too often assume toward those who are seated in the inferior ranks of life? Is it proper I should say how much her behaviour won upon the esteem of all that knew her, though I could appeal to the general sorrow at her death to confirm the truth of it? but who can forbear on this occasion to take notice how far she acquired that lovely character in her narrow and private sphere, which seems almost to have been derived to her by inheritance from her honoured father deceased, who had the tears of his country long dropping upon his tomb, and whose memory yet lives in a thousand hearts?

Such a conversation and such a character, made up of piety and virtue, were prepared for the attacks of a fever with malignant and mortal symptoms. Slow and unsuspected were the advances of the disease, till the powers of reason began to falter, and retire, till the heralds of death had made their appearance and spread on her bosom their purple ensigns. When these disorders began her lucid intervals were longer, and while she thought no person was near

she could address herself to God, and say, how often she had given herself to him; she hoped she had done it sincerely; and found acceptance with him, and trusted that she was not deceived. The gleams of reason that broke in between the clouds gave her light enough to discern her own evidences of piety, and refresh her hope. Then she repeated some of the last verses of the 139th Psalm in metre, (viz.)

Lord, search my soul, try every thought:
Though my own heart accuse me not
Of walking in a false disguise,
I beg the trial of thine eyes.

Doth secret mischief lurk within?
Do I indulge some unknown sin?
O turn my feet whene'er I stray,
And lead me in thy perfect way.

She was frequent and importunate in her requests for the Psalm-book, that she might read that Psalm, or at least have it read to her throughout; and it was with some difficulty we persuaded her to be composed in silence; thus sincerely willing was she that God might search and try her heart, still hoping well concerning her spiritual state, yet still solicitous about the assurance of her own sincerity in her former transactions with heaven.

The next day, among the rovings of her thoughts, she rehearsed all those verses of the 17th Psalm, which are paraphrased in the same book, with very little faltering in a line or two:

Lord, I am thine; but thou wilt prove
My faith, my patience, and my love, &c.

The traces of her thoughts under this confusion of animal nature retained something in them divine and heavenly.

O blessed situation of soul, when we stand prepared for death, though it come with the formidable retinue of a disordered brain and clouded reason! it would be too long at present to represent to you the sad consequences of being found asleep when Christ comes to call us away from this world, I shall therefore only make these three reflections.

Refl. 1. None can begin too early to awake to righteousness and prepare for the call of Christ, since no one is too young to be sent for by his messenger of death. I do not here speak of the state of infancy, when persons can hardly be said to be in a personal state of trial: but when I say, none can awake too early to mind the things of religion, I mean, after reason begins its proper exercise, and this appears sometimes in early childhood. All our life in this world, compared with heaven, is a sort of night and season of darkness; and if our Lord summon us away in the first watch of the night, in the midst of youth and vigour, and the pleasing allurements of flesh and sense, we are in a deplorable state if we are found sleeping, and hurried away from earth into the invisible world in the midst of our foolish dreams of golden vanity. Dreadful indeed, to have a young thoughtless creature carried off the stage sleeping and dead in trespasses and sins! Let those that are drunk with wine fall asleep upon the top of a mast in the middle of the sea, where the winds and the waves are tossing and roaring all around them: let a mad-man who has lost his reason lie down to sleep upon the edge of a precipice where a pit of fire and brimstone is burning beneath him and ready to receive his fall; but let not young sinners whose rational powers are in exercise, and whose life is every moment a mere uncertainty, venture to go on in their dangerous slumbers while the wrath of God and eternal misery attend them if they die before they are awake.

It is granted that no power beneath that which is

divine, can effectually quicken a dead soul and awaken it into a divine life. It is the work of "God to quicken the dead," Rom. iv. 17. Eph. ii. 5. It is the Son of God, who is the "light and life of the world," John i. 4. To whom "the Father hath given this quickening power," John vi. 26. He calls sinners to awake them from their deadly sleep, Eph. v. 14. And they live by him as he lives by the Father, John vi. 57. He awakens dead souls to life by the same "living Spirit which shall quicken their mortal bodies," and raise them from the grave, Rom. vii. 9, 11, 13, 2 Cor. iii. 3, which Spirit he "hath received from the Father," John iii. 34. And on this account we are to seek the vital influences of this grace from heaven by constant and importunate prayer. Yet in my text, as well as in other scriptures, "awaking out of sleep and watching unto righteousness," is represented as our duty, and we are to exert all our natural powers with holy fervency for this end, while our daily petitions draw down from heaven the promised aids of grace. Our diligence in duty and our dependence on the divine power and mercy are happily and effectually joined in the command of our Saviour on this very occasion in one of his parables, Mark xiii. 33. "Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is that the Lord will come." And again, Chapter xiv. 38: "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." Trust not in your own strength and sufficiency for the glorious change to be wrought in your sinful hearts, and yet neglect not your own labours and restless endeavours under a pretence that it is God's work and not yours. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

Nor should frail dying creatures in their youngest years delay this work one day nor one hour, since the consequences of being found asleep when Christ calls, are terrible indeed. We are beset with morta-

lity all around us; the seeds of disease and dissolution are working within us from our very birth and cradle ever since sin entered into our natures; and we should ever be in readiness to remove hence, since we are never secure from the summons of Heaven, the stroke of death and the demands of the grave.

There was a lovely boy, the son of the Shunamite, who was given to his mother in a miraculous way, and when he was in the field among the reapers, he cried out, My head, my head; he was carried home immediately, and in a few hours died in his mother's bosom, 2 Kings iv. 18. Who would have imagined that headach should have been death, and that in so short a time too? This is almost the case which we lament at present: the headach was sent but a few days before, nor was the pain very intense, nor the appearance dangerous, yet it became the fatal though unexpected forerunner of death.

This providence is an awful warning-piece to all her young acquaintance to be ready for a sudden removal; for she was of a healthy make, and seemed to stand at as great distance from the gates of death as any of you: but the firmest constitution of human nature is born with death in it. From every age and every spot of ground and every moment of time there are short and sudden ways of descent to the grave. Trap-doors (if I may use so low a metaphor) are always under us, and a thousand unseen avenues to the regions of the dead. A malignant fever strikes the strongest nature with a mortal blast at the command of the great Author and Disposer of life. My youngest hearers may be called away from the earth by the next pain that seizes them. Nothing but religion, early religion and sincere godliness can give you hope in youthful death, or leave a fragrant savour on your name or memory among those that survive.

Refl. 2. If such blessedness as I have described belong to every watchful Christian at the hour of death, then it may not be improper here to take notice of some peculiar advantages which attend those who shake off the deadly sleep of sin in their younger years, and are awake early to God and religion.

(1.) They have much fewer sins to mourn over on a death-bed, and they prevent much bitter repentance for youthful iniquities. Holy Job was a man of distinguished piety, and God himself pronounces of him, that "there was none like him in all the earth," Job i. 18; but it is a question whether his most early days were devoted to God, and whether he was so watchful over his behaviour in that dangerous season of life, for he makes a heavy complaint in his addresses to God, Job xiii. 26: "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." The sooner we begin to be awake to holiness, the more of these follies and sorrows are prevented: happy those who have the fewest of them to imbitter their following lives, or make a death-bed painful!

(2.) Young persons have fewer attachments to the world, and the persons and things of it which are round about them, and are more ready to part with it when their souls are united to God by an early faith and love. They have not yet entered into so numerous engagements of life, nor dwelt long enough here to have their hearts grown so fast on to creatures which usually makes the parting-stroke so full of anguish and smarting sorrow. A child can much more easily ascend to heaven and leave a parent behind, without that tender and painful solicitude which a dying parent has for the welfare of a surviving child. The surrender of all mortal interests at the call of God is much more easy when our souls are not tied to them by so many strings, nor united by so many of the softer endearments of nature, and where grace

has taught us to practise an early weaning from all temporal comforts, and a little loosened our hearts from them by the faith of things eternal.

(3.) Those that have been awake betimes to godliness give peculiar honour to the gospel, at death, and leave this testimony to the divine religion of Jesus, that it was able to subdue passion and appetite in that season of life when they are usually strongest and most unruly. They give peculiar credit and glory to the Christian name and the gospel, which has gained them so many victories over the enemies of their salvation, at that age wherein multitudes are the captives of sin and slaves to folly and vanity.

(4.) Those Christians who are awake to God in their early years leave more happy and powerful examples of living and dying to their young companions and acquaintance. It is the temper of every age of life to be more influenced and affected by the practice of persons of the same years. Sin has fewer excuses to make in order to shield itself from the reproof of such examples, who have renounced it betimes; and virtue carries with it a more effectual motive to persuade young sinners to piety and goodness when it can point to its votaries of the same age and in the same circumstances of life. Why may not this be practised by you as well as by your companions round about you, of the same age? But I must hasten to the last reflection.

Refl. 3. When we mourn the death of friends who were prepared for an early summons, let their preparation be our support. Blessed be God, they were not found sleeping! while we drop our tears upon the grave of any young Christian who was awake and alive to God, that blessedness which Christ himself pronounces upon them is a sweet cordial to mingle with our bitter sorrows, and will greatly assist to dry up the spring of them. The idea of their piety and their approbation in the sight of God is a

balm to heal the wound and give present ease to the heart-ache.

We are ready to run over their virtues, and spread abroad their amiable qualities in our thoughts, and then with seeming reason we give a loose to the mournful passion; whereas all these, when set in a true light, are real ingredients towards our relief.

We lament the loss of our departed friend, when we review that capacious and uncommon power of memory which the God of nature had given her, and which was so well furnished with a variety of human and divine knowledge, and was stored with a rich treasure of the word of God, so that if Providence had called her into a more public appearance, she might have stood up in the world as a burning and shining light so far as her sex and station required. This furniture of the mind seems indeed to be lost in death and buried in the grave; but we give in too much to the judgment of sense; did not this extensive knowledge lay a foundation for her early piety? and did it not by this means prepare her for a more speedy removal to a higher school of improvements, and a world of sublimer devotion? and does she not shine there among brighter and better company?

We mourn again for our loss of a person so valuable, when we think of that general calmness and sedateness of soul which she possessed in a peculiar degree, so that she was not greatly elevated or depressed by common accidents or occurrences; but this secured her from the rise of unruly passions, those stormy powers of nature which sometimes sink us into guilt and distress, and make us unwilling and afraid of the sudden summons of Christ, lest he should find us under these disorders.

We think of her firmness of spirit and that steady resolution which, joined with a natural reserve, was a happy guard against many of the forward follies and

dangers of youth, and proved a successful defence against some of the allurements and temptations of the gayer years of life; and then we mourn afresh that a person so well formed for growing prudence and virtue should be so suddenly snatched away from amongst us. But this steady and dispassionate frame of soul, well improved by religion and divine grace, became an effectual means to preserve her youth more unblemished, and made her spirit fitter for the heavenly world, where nothing can enter that is defiled, and whose delights are not tumultuous as ours are on earth, but all is a calm and rational state of joy.

We lament yet further when we think of her native goodness and unwillingness to displease: but goodness is the very temper of that region to which she is gone, and she is the fitter companion for the inhabitants of a world of love.

We lament that such a pattern of early piety should be taken from the earth, when there are so few practicers of it, especially among the youth of our degenerate age, and in plentiful circumstances of life. But it is a matter of high thankfulness to God who endowed her with those valuable qualities, and trained her up so soon for a world so much better than ours is. Let our sorrow for the deceased be changed into devout praises, to divine grace. Let us imitate the holy language of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, and say, we are comforted even at her grave in all our affliction and distress by the remembrance of her faith and piety. What sufficient thanks can we render unto God upon her account for all the joy wherewith we rejoice for her sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see her face in the state of perfection? and may God himself, even our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to the happy world where she dwells, 1 Thessalonians iii. 7, &c. The imitation of what was excellent in

her life and watchful readiness to follow her in death are the best honours we can pay her memory, and the wisest improvement of the present providence. May the Spirit of grace teach us these lessons and make us learn them with power, that when our Lord Jesus shall come to call us hence by death, or shall appear with all his saints in the great rising-day, we may be found among his wakeful servants, and partake of the promised blessedness! Amen.

DISCOURSE III.

SURPRISE IN DEATH.

MARK XIII. 36.

Watch ye therefore; lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.

AMONG the parables of our Saviour there are several recorded by the evangelists, which represent him as a Prince, or Lord and Master of a family, departing for a season from his servants, and in his absence appointing them their proper work, with a solemn charge to wait for his return; at which time he foretold them that he should require an account of their behaviour in his absence, and he either intimates or expresses a severe treatment of those who should neglect their duty while he was gone, or make no preparation for his appearance. He informs them also that he should come upon them suddenly, and for this reason charges them to be always awake and upon their guard, ver. 35: "Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh; whether at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning."

Though the ultimate design of these parables, and

the coming of Christ mentioned therein, refer to the great day of judgment, when he shall return from heaven, shall raise the dead, and call mankind to appear before his judgment-seat to receive a recompense according to their works; yet both the duties and the warnings which are represented in these parables seem to be very accommodable to the hour of our death; for then our Lord Jesus, who has the keys of death and the grave and the unseen world, comes to finish our state of trial, and to put a period to all our works on earth: he comes then to call us into the invisible state; he disposes our bodies to the dust, and our souls are sent into other mansions, and taste some degrees of appointed happiness or misery according to their behaviour here. The solemn and awful warning which my text gives us concerning the return of Christ to judgment, may be therefore pertinently applied to the season when he shall send his messenger of death to fetch us hence: "Watch ye therefore; lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping."

When I had occasion to treat on a subject near akin to this,* I showed that there was a distinction to be made between the "dead sleep of a sinner, and the slumber of an unwatchful Christian." Those who never had the work of religion begun in their hearts or lives are sleeping the sleep of death; whereas some who are made alive by the grace of Christ yet may indulge sinful drowsiness, and grow careless and secure, slothful and inactive. The wise virgins as well as the foolish were slumbering and sleeping. Matt. xxv. 5. The mischiefs and sorrows which attend each of these when Christ shall summon them to judgment, or shall call them away from earth by

* In a Funeral Sermon for Mrs. Sarah Abney, on Luke xii. 37: "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he comes, shall find watching."

natural death, are great and formidable, though they are not equally dangerous: let us consider each of them in succession, in order to rouse dead sinners from their lethargy and to keep drowsy Christians awake.

First, let us survey the sad consequences which attend those that are asleep in sin, and spiritually dead when the hour of natural death approaches: they are such as these:—

1. If they happen to be awakened on the borders of the grave, into what a horrible confusion and distress of soul are they plunged! What keen anguish of conscience for their past iniquities seizes upon them! What bitter remorse and self-reproaches, for the seasons of grace which they have wasted, for the proposals of mercy which they have abused and rejected, and for the divine salvation which seems now to be lost for ever, and put almost beyond the reach of possibility and hope! They feel the messenger of death laying his cold hands upon them, and they shudder and tremble with the expectation of approaching misery. They look up to heaven, and they see a God of holiness there as a consuming fire ready to devour them as stubble fit for the flame; they look to the Son of God, who has the keys of death in his hand, and who calls them away from the land of the living, even to Jesus, the compassionate mediator, but they can scarcely persuade themselves to expect any thing from him, because they have turned a deaf ear so long to the invitations of his gospel, and so long affronted his divine compassion. They look behind them, and with painful agonies are frightened at the mountains of their former guilt ready to overwhelm them: they look forward and see the pit of hell opening upon them with all its torments; long darkness without a glimpse of light, and eternal despair with no glimmerings of hope.

Or if now and then amidst their horrors they would

try to form some faint hope of mercy, how are their spirits perplexed with prevailing and distracting fears, with keen and cutting reflections? O that I had improved my former seasons for reading, for praying, for meditating on divine things! but I cannot read, I can hardly meditate, and scarce know how to pray. Will the ear of God ever hearken to the cries and groans of a rebel that has so long resisted his grace? Are there any pardons to be had for a criminal who never left his sins till vengeance was in view? Will the blood of Christ ever be applied to wash a soul that has wallowed in his defilements till death roused him out of them? Will the meanest favour of Heaven be indulged to a wretch that has grown bold in sin in opposition to so loud and repeated warnings? I am awake indeed, but I can see nothing round me but distresses and discouragements, and my soul sinks within me, and my heart dies at the thoughts of appearing before God.

It is a wise and just observation among Christians, though it is a very common one, that the scriptures give us one instance of a penitent saved in his dying hour, and that is the thief upon the cross, that so none might utterly despair: but there is but one such instance given, that none might presume. The work of repentance is too difficult and too important a thing to be left to the languors of a dying bed and the tumults and flutterings of thought which attend such a late conviction. There can be hardly any effectual proofs given of the sincerity of such repentings: and I am verily persuaded there are few of them sincere; for we have often found these violent emotions of conscience vanish again if the sinner has happened to recover his health: they seem to be merely the wild perplexities and struggles of nature averse to misery rather than averse to sin. Their renouncing their former lusts on the very borders of hell and destruction, is more like the vehement and

irregular efforts of a drowning creature, constrained to let go a most beloved object, and taking eager hold of any plank for safety, rather than the calm and reasonable and voluntary designs of a mariner, who forsakes his earthly joys, ventures himself in a ship that is offered him, and sets sail for the heavenly country. I never will pronounce such efforts and endeavours desperate, lest I limit the grace of God, which is unbounded; but I can give very little encouragement for hope to an hour or two of this vehement and tumultuous penitence on the very brink of damnation. Judas repented, but his agonies of soul hurried him to hasten his own death, that he might go to his own place; and there is abundance of such kind of repenting in every corner of hell: that is a deep and dreadful pit whence there is no redemption, though there are millions of such sort of penitents: it is a strong and dark prison where no beam of comfort ever shines, where bitter anguish and mourning for sins past is no evangelical repentance, but everlasting and hopeless sorrow.

II. Those that are found sleeping at the hour of death are carried away at once from all their sensual pursuits and enjoyments, which were their chosen portion and their highest happiness. At once they lose all their golden dreams, and their chief good is, as it were, snatched away from them at once and for ever. They stand on slippery places, they are brought to destruction in a moment, and all their former joys are like a dream when one awaketh, and finds himself beset round with terrors.

Are there any of you that are pleasing yourselves here in the days of youth and vanity, and indulge your dreams of pleasure in the sleep of spiritual death? Think of the approaching moment when the death of nature shall dissolve your sleep, and scatter all the delusive images of sinful joy. This separation from the body of flesh is a fearful shock given to the soul,

that makes it awake indeed. Sermons would not do it; the voice of the preacher was not loud enough; strokes of affliction and smarting providences would not do it; perhaps the soul might be roused a little, but dropt into profound sleep again: sudden or surprising deaths near them, and even the pains of nature in their own flesh, their own sicknesses and diseases did not awaken them, nor the voice of the Lord in them all: but the parting stroke that divides the soul and body will terribly awaken the soul from the vain delusion, and all its fancied delights for ever vanish.

When they are visited by the Lord of hosts with this thunder and earthquake, as the prophet Isaiah speaks, when this storm and tempest of death shall shake the sinner out of his airy visions, he shall be as a hungry man that dreameth he was eating, but awakes and his soul is empty; or as a thirsty creature dreaming that he drinks, but he awaketh and behold he is faint, and his soul is pained with raging appetite: the sinner finds to his own torment how wretchedly he has deceived himself, and fed upon vanity: there are no more earthly objects to please his senses and to gratify his inclinations; but the soul for ever lies upon a rack of carnal desire, and no proper object to satisfy it. His taste is not suited to the pleasures of a world of spirits, he can find no God there to comfort him: God with his offers of grace are gone for ever, and the world with its joys are for ever vanished, while the wretched and malicious creatures into whose company he is hurried, and who were the tempters or associates of his crimes, shall stand round him to become his tormentors.

III. Though death will awaken sinful souls into a sharper or more lively sense of divine and heavenly things than ever they had in this world, yet they shall never be awakened to spiritual life and holiness: and I think I may add, that though they should be awa-

kened to a sight of God, and his justice and his grace, to a sight of heaven and hell, more immediate and perspicuous than what even the saints themselves usually enjoy in this life, yet they would remain still under the bondage of their lusts, still dead in trespasses and sins. They shall for ever continue unbeloved of God and uncapable of all the happiness of the heavenly state, because they are for ever averse to the holiness of God, and themselves for ever unholy. It is only in the present state of trial and under the present proposals of grace that sleeping sinners can be awakened into the spiritual and divine life. The voice of the Son of God that breaks the monuments of brass and makes tombs of hardest marble yield to his call, shall never break one heart of stone which is gone down to death in its native and sinful hardness: that almighty voice that must awaken the nations of the dead and command their bodies up from the grave, shall never awaken one dead soul when they are past the limits of this life. The compassionate calls of a Saviour and the offers of mercy are then come to their utmost period: and if we refuse to hear the call of mercy to the moment of death, we shall then be terribly constrained to feel the loss of it, but never able to obtain the blessing.

Obstinate sleepers shall be awakened to see God, but only as Balaam was: "I shall see him, but not nigh," Numb. xxiv. 17. The saints in this life have God near them in all their trials as a father and a friend to uphold, to comfort, to sanctify, though they see him but darkly through a glass, and behold but little of his power or glory: the sinner awaking in hell shall perhaps have a clearer and more acute perception of what God is than any saint on earth: but he shall behold him as an enemy and not a friend: if he beholds him in the glory of his grace, it is at a dreadful and insuperable distance; there is no grace for him: he sees him in his holiness, but he cannot

love him: he has no meltings of true penitence for his former rebellions against God, his heart is hardened into everlasting enmity, and shall never taste of his love. Hence arise all the foul and gnawing passions of envy, malignity, and long despair, which are the very image of Satan, and change mankind into devils.

These impenitent sons and daughters of men shall grow into the more complete likeness of those wicked spirits, and under the impressions of their guilt and damnation they shall rival those apostate and cursed creatures in the obstinate hatred of God and all that is holy.

IV. Hence it will follow, in the last place, that the sinner who is "fast asleep in his sins at the hour of death shall awake into such a life as is worse than dying." He shall be surprised all at once into darkness and fire which have no gleam of light, and sorrows without mitigation, and which can find no end. The punishment of hell is not called eternal death to denote a state of senseless and stupid existence; but death being the most opposite to life and all the enjoyments of it, the misery of hell is described by death as the most formidable thing to nature, as a word that puts a period to all the enjoyments of this mortal life, and stands directly opposite to a life of joy and glory in the immortal world. Happy would it be for such souls if they could sink into an everlasting sleep and grow stupid and senseless for ever and ever; but this is a favour not to be granted to those who have been constant and unrepenting rebels against the law and the grace of God.

The moment when the body falls asleep in death, the soul is more awake than ever to behold its own guilt and wretchedness. It has then such a lively and piercing sense of its own iniquities and the divine wrath that is due to them, as it never saw or felt before. The inward senses of the soul (if I may so

express it) which have been darkened and stupified and benumbed in this body, are all awake at once when the veil of flesh is thrown off, and the curtains are drawn back which divide them from the world of spirits. Every thought of sin and the anger of God wounds the spirit deep in this awakened state, though it scarce felt any thing of it before: and "a wounded spirit who can bear?" Prov. viii. 14. But sinners must bear it days without end, and ages without hope.

Then the crimes they have committed and the sinful pleasures they have indulged, shall glare upon their remembrance and stare them in the face with dreadful surprise; and each of them is enough to drive a soul to despair: nor can they turn their eyes away from the horrid sight, for their criminal practices beset them around, and the naked soul is all sight and all sense; it is eye and ear all over; it hears the dreadful curses of the law and the sentence of the Judge, and never, never forgets it. This is the character, these the circumstances of an obstinate sinner that awakes not till the moment of death, and lifts up his eyes in hell, as our Saviour expresses it: these will be the consequences of our guilt and folly, if we are found in a dead sleep of sin when our Lord comes to call us from this mortal state.

Secondly. Let us spend a few thoughts also upon the dangerous and unhappy circumstances of those of whom we may have some reason to hope they have once begun religion in good earnest, and are made spiritually alive, but have indulged themselves in drowsiness and worn out the latter end of their days in a careless, secure and slothful frame of spirit.

1. If they have had the principle of vital religion wrought in their hearts, yet by these criminal slumbers they darken or lose their evidences of grace, and by this means they cut themselves off from the

sweet reflections and comforts of it on a dying bed, when they have most need of them. They know not whether they are the children of God or not, and are in anxious confusion and distressing fear: they have scarce any plain proofs of their conversion to God and the evidences of true Christianity ready at hand, when all are little enough to support their spirits: they have not used themselves to search for them by self-inquiry and to keep them in their sight, and therefore they are missing in this important hour; they have not been wont to live upon their heavenly hopes, and they cannot be found when they want them to rest upon in death: they die therefore almost like sinners, though they may perhaps have been once converted to holiness, and there may be a root of grace remaining in them; and the reason is, because they have lived too much as sinners do: they have given too great and criminal an indulgence to the vain and worldly cares or the trifling amusements of this life; these have engrossed almost all their thoughts and their time, and therefore in the day of death they fall under terrors and painful apprehensions of a doubtful eternity just at hand.

If we have not walked closely with God in this world, we may well be afraid to appear before him in the next. If we have not maintained a constant converse with Jesus our Saviour by holy exercises of faith and hope, it is no wonder if we are not so ready with cheerfulness and joy to resign our departing spirits into his hand. It is possible we may have a right to the inheritance of heaven, having had some sight of it by faith as revealed in the gospel, having in the main chosen it for our portion and set our feet in the path of holiness that leads to it; but we have so often wandered out of the way, that in this awful and solemn hour we shall be in doubt whether we shall be received at the gates and enter into the city.

Such unwatchful Christians have not kept the eternal glories of heaven in their constant and active pursuit, they have not lived upon them as their portion and inheritance, they have been too much strangers to the invisible world of happiness, and they know not how to venture through death into it. They have built indeed upon the solid foundation, Christ Jesus and the gospel, but they have mingled so much hay and stubble with the superstructure, that when they depart hence, or when they appear before Christ in judgment, "they shall suffer great loss by the burning of their works, yet themselves may be saved so as by fire." 1 Cor. iii. 10—15. They may pass as it were by the flame of hell, and have something like the scorching terrors of it in death, though the abounding and forgiving grace of the gospel may convey them safe to heaven: they escape as a man that is awakened with the sudden alarms of fire, who suffers the loss of his substance, and a great part of the fruit of his labours, and just saves his own life. They plunge into eternity, and make a sort of terrible escape from hell.

2. They can never expect any peculiar favours from heaven at the hour of death, no special visitations of the comforting spirits, nor that the love of God and the joy of his presence should attend them through the dark valley. It is not to such unwatchful or sleepy Christians that God is wont to vouchsafe his choicest consolations. They fall under terrible fears about the pardon of their sins, when they stand in most need of the sight of their pardon; and Christ as the ruler of his churches sees it fit they should be thus punished for their negligence. They lay hold of the promises of mercy with a trembling hand and cannot claim them by a vigorous faith, because they have not been wont to live upon them, nor do they see those holy characters in their own hearts and lives which confirm their title to them. They have no

bright views of the celestial world and earnest of their salvation, for it is only for watchful souls that these cordials are prepared in the fainting hour: it is only to the watchful Christian that these fore-tastes of glory are given. "The fruit of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever," Isa. xxxii. 17: "Blessed is he which watcheth and keepeth his garments" clean, that he may enter with triumph to that city, where nothing shall enter that defileth.

3. Slumbering and slothful Christians are oftentimes left to wrestle with sore temptations of Satan, and have dreadful conflicts in the day of death: and the reason is evident, because they have not watched against their adversary, and obtained but few victories over him in their life. These temptations are keen and piercing thorns that enter deep into the heart of a dying creature. The devil may be let loose upon them with great wrath, knowing that his time is but short; and yet there is great justice in the conduct of the God of heaven, in giving them up to be buffeted by the powers of hell. What frightful agonies are raised in the conscience by the tempter and accuser of souls on a sick or dying bed can hardly be described by the living, and are known only to those who have felt them in death.

4. Such drowsy Christians make dismal work for new and terrible repentance on a death-bed; for though they have sincerely repented in times past of their former sins, yet having too much omitted the self-mortifying duties, having given too much indulgence to temptation and folly, and having not maintained this habitual penitence for their daily offences in constant exercise, their spirits are now filled with fresh convictions and bitter remorse of heart. The guilt of their careless and slothful conduct finds them out now, and besets them around, and they feel most acute sorrows and wounding reflections of conscience,

while they have need of most comfort. What a glorious entrance had St. Paul into the world of spirits and the presence of Christ! He had made repentance and mortification and faith in Jesus his daily work: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I run, I fight, I subdue my body and keep it under; I am crucified to the world and the world to me; the life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God:" when he was ready to be offered up, and the time of his departure was at hand, from the edge of the sword and the borders of the grave he could look back upon his former life, and say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me." 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

5. The unwatchful Christian, at the hour of death, has the pain and anguish of reflecting, that he has omitted many duties to God and man, and these can never be performed now; that he has done scarce any services for Christ in the world, and those must be left for ever undone: there is no further work or device, no labours of zeal, no activity for God in the grave whither we are hastening. Eccl. x. 10. Alas! I have brought forth but little fruit to God, and it is well if I be not cast away as an unprofitable servant. My talents have lain bound up in rust, or been but poorly employed whilst I have lain slumbering and unactive: the records of my life in the court of heaven will show but very little service for God amongst men: I have raised few monuments of praise to my Redeemer, and I can never raise them now. I shall have but few testimonies for my love and zeal, to appear in the great day of account, when the martyrs and the confessors and the lively Christians shall be surrounded with the living ensigns of their victories over sin and the world, and their glorious services

for their Redeemer. Wretch that I am! that I have loved my Lord at so cold a rate, and lain slumbering on a bed of ease whilst I should have been fighting the battles of the Lord, and gaining daily honours for my Saviour!

6. As such sort of Christians give but little glory to God in life, so they do him no honour in death; they are no ornaments to religion while they continue here, and leave perhaps but little comfort with their friends when they go hence: doubtings and jealousies about their eternal welfare mingle with our tears and sorrows for a dying friend; these anxious fears about the departed spirit swell the tide of our grief high, and double the inward anguish. They are gone, alas! from our world, but we know not whither they are gone, to heaven or to hell. A sad farewell to those whom we love! a dismal parting-stroke and a long heart-ache!

And what honour can be expected to be done to God or his Son, what reputation or glory can be given to religion and the gospel by a drowsy Christian departing as it were under a special lethargy? he dies under a cloud and casts a gloom upon the Christian faith. St. Paul was a man of another spirit, a lively and active saint, full of vigour and zeal in his soul: it was the holy resolution and assurance of this blessed apostle, "that Christ should be magnified in his body, whether by life or death." Phil. i. 20. He spent his life in the service of Christ, and he could rejoice in death as his gain. It is a glory to the gospel when we can lie down, and die with courage in the hope of its promised blessings. It is an honour to our common faith, when it overcomes the terrors of death, and raises the Christian to a song of triumph in view of the last enemy. It is as a new crown put upon the head of our Redeemer, and a living cordial put into the hands of mourning friends in our dying hour, when we can

take our leave of them with holy fortitude, rejoicing in the salvation of Christ. No sooner does he call, but we are ready, and can answer with holy transport, "Lord, I come." This is a blessing that belongs only to the watchful Christian. May every one of us be awake to salvation in our expiring moments, and partake of this glorious blessedness!

I proceed now to a few remarks, and particularly such as relate to the necessity and duty of constant watchfulness, and the hazardous case of sleeping souls.

1. Remark. To presume on long life is a most dangerous temptation, for it is the common spring and cause of spiritual sleep and drowsiness. Could we take an inward view of the hearts of men, and trace out the springs of their coldness and indifference about eternal things, and the shameful neglect of their most important interests, we should find this secret thought in the bottom of their hearts, that "we are not like to die to-day or to-morrow." They put this evil day afar off, and indulge themselves in their carnal delights without due solicitude to prepare for the call of God. There is scarce any thing produces so much evil fruit in the world, so much shameful wickedness amongst the sensual and profane, or such neglect of lively religion amongst real Christians, as this bitter root of presumption upon life and time before us. Matt. xxiv. 48, 49: The evil servant did not begin to "smite his fellows and to eat and drink with the drunken, till he said in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming:" it was while the bridegroom tarried, and they imagined he would tarry longer, that even the wise virgins fell into slumbers. Ask your own heart, my friends; does not this thought secretly lurk within you when you comply with a temptation, "Surely I shall not die yet; I have no sickness upon me, nor tokens of death, I shall live a little longer and repent of my follies?" Vain expectation and ground-

less fancy! when you see the young and the strong and the healthy seized away from the midst of you, and a final period put at once to all their works and designs in this life. Yet we are foolish enough to imagine our term of life shall be extended, and we presume upon months and years which God hath not written down for us in his own book, and which he will never give us to enjoy.

We are all borderers upon the river of death which conveys us into the eternal world, and we should be ever waiting the call of our Lord, that we may launch away with joy to the regions of immortality: but thoughtless creatures that we are, we are perpetually wandering far up into the fields of sense and time, we are gathering the gay and fading flowers that grow there, and filling our laps with them as a fair treasure, or making garlands for ambition to crown our brows, till one and another of us is called off on a sudden and hurried away from this mortal coast: those of us who survive are surprised a little: we stand gazing, follow our departing friends with a weeping eye for a minute or two, and then fall to our amusements again, and grow busy, as before, in gathering the flowers of time and sense. O how fond we are to enrich ourselves with these perishing trifles, and adorn our heads with honours and withering vanities, never thinking which of us may receive the next summons to leave all behind us and stand before God; but each presumes, it will not be sent to me. We trifle with God and things eternal, or utterly forget them, while our hands and our hearts are thus deeply engaged in the pursuit of our earthly delights: all our powers of thought and action are intensely busied amongst the dreams of this life, while we are asleep to God, because we vainly imagine that he will not call us yet.

2. Remark. Whatsoever puts us in mind of dying, should be improved to awaken us from our

spiritual sleep. Sudden deaths near us should have this effect; our young companions and acquaintance snatched away from us in an unexpected hour should become our monitors in death, and teach us this divine and needful lesson: the surprising loss of our friends who lay near our hearts, should put us in mind of our own departure, and powerfully awaken us from our dangerous slumbers. Sinners, when they feel no sorrows, think of no death; but when the judgments of God are in the earth, his Spirit can awaken the inhabitants of the world to learn righteousness. At such season it is time for the sinners in Zion to be afraid, and fearfulness to surprise the hypocrites. Even the children of God have sometimes need of painful warning-pieces to awake them from their careless, their slothful, and their secure frame: and as for those souls who are indeed awake to righteousness, and lively in the practice of all religion and virtue, such sudden and awful strokes of Providence have a happy tendency to wean them from creatures, and keep them awake to God, that when their Lord comes he may find them watching, and pronounce upon them everlasting blessedness.

3. Remark. No person can be exempted from this duty of watchfulness, till he is lord of his own life, and can appoint the time of his own dying. Then indeed you might have some colour for your carnal indulgences, some pretence for sleeping, if you were sovereign of death and the grave, and had the keys in your own hand.

And truly such as venture to sleep in sin do in effect say, We are lords of our own life: they act and manage as if their times were in their own hands, and not in the hand of their Maker: but the watchful Christian lives upon that principle which David professes, Psalm xxxi. 15: "My times are in thine hand, O Lord;" and they never give rest

to themselves till they can rejoice with him, and say to the Lord, "Thou art my God; into thy hands I commit my spirit, for thou hast redeemed it, and I leave it to thy appointment when thou wilt dislodge me from this body of flesh and blood, and call me into thy more immediate presence." If we could but resist the messenger of death when the Lord of hosts has sent it, if we could shut the mouth of the grave when the Son of God has opened it for us with the key that is intrusted in his hand, we might say then to our souls, "Sleep on upon your bed of ease and take your rest:" but wo be to those who will venture to sleep in an unholy and unpardoned state, or even allow themselves the indulgence of short and sinful slumbers, when they cannot resist death one moment, when they cannot delay the summons of Heaven, when they cannot defer their appear ance before that Judge, whose sentence is eternal pleasure or everlasting pain.

Our holy watch must not be intermitted one moment, for every following moment is a grand uncertainty. There is no minute of life, no point of time wherein I can say I shall not die, and therefore I should not dare to say, this minute I shall take a short slumber. What if my Lord should summon me while he finds me sleeping? his command cannot be disobeyed, the very call and sound of it divides me from flesh and blood and all that is mortal, and sends me at once into the eternal world, for it is an almighty voice.

4. Remark. As it is a foolish and dangerous thing for any of the sons and daughters of men to presume upon long life and neglect their watch, so persons under some peculiar circumstances are eminently called to be ever wakeful. Give me leave here to reckon up some of them, and make a particular address to the persons concerned.

(1.) Is your constitution of body weak and feeble?

You carry then a perpetual warning about you never to indulge sinful drowsiness. Every languor of nature assures you that it is sinking to the dust: every pain you feel should put you in mind that the pains of death are ready to seize you: you are entering upon the very borders of the grave, and will you venture to drop in before your hopes of life and immortality are secured in a joyful resurrection? You pass perhaps many nights wherein the infirmities of your flesh will not suffer you to sleep and to take that common refreshment of nature, and shall not the same infirmities keep you awake to things spiritual, and rouse all your thoughts and cares about your immortal interests?

(2.) You whose circumstances and employments of life expose you to perpetual danger either by land or sea; you who carry your lives as it were in your hand, and are often in a day within a few inches of death; as it is necessary for you to inquire daily, am I prepared for a departure hence? am I ready to hear the summons of my Lord and ready to give up my account before him? A fall from a horse or a house-top may send you to the pit whence there is no redemption; every wind that blows, and every rising wave may convey you into the eternal world, and are you ready to meet the great God in such a surprise and without warning?

(3.) You who are young and vigorous and flourish amidst all the gaieties and allurements of life, you are in most danger of being lulled asleep in sin, and therefore I addressed you lately in a funeral discourse, when the present providence gave each of you a new and loud call to awake, and I pray God you may hear his voice in it.

(4.) Perhaps others of you are arrived at old age, and the course of nature forbids you to expect a long continuance in the land of the living: are any of my hearers ancient sinners and asleep still? Venturous

and thoughtless creatures! that have grown old in slumber, and worn out their whole life in iniquity! surely it is time for you to hear the voice of the Son of God in the gospel, and accept of his salvation: behold the Judge is at the door; he comes speedily, and he will not tarry; his herald of death is just at hand: are you willing that he should seize you in a deadly sleep, and send you into eternal sorrows?

And let aged Christians bestir themselves and awake from their slothful and secure frames of spirit, let them look upward to the crown that is not far off, to the prize that is almost within reach: whatsoever your hand or heart find to do for God, do it with all your zeal and might: let your loins be girt about, and your natural powers active in his service, let your lamp of profession be bright and burning, that when Jesus comes you may receive him with joy.

(5.) And are there any of you that are under decays of grace and piety, that are labouring and wrestling with strong corruptions, or in actual conflict with repeated temptations which too often prevail over you, it becomes you to hear the watch-word which Christ often gives to his churches under such circumstances: make haste and awake unto holiness, be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die; hold fast what thou hast received; remember thy first affection and zeal, and repent and mourn for what thou hast lost, lest I come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know the hour: remember whence thou art fallen and repent, and do thy first works, for thou hast lost thy first love: have a care of dangerous lukewarmness and indifference in the things of religion. This is the very temper of a sleepy declining Christian, while he dreams he is rich and has great attainments, take heed lest presuming upon thy riches and thy self-sufficiency, thou shouldest be found "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Keep your souls awake

hourly, and be upon your guard against every adversary and every defilement, lest ye be seized away in the commission of some sin, or in the compliance with some foul temptation. The drowsy soldier is liable to be led captive and to die in fetters, and groan heavily in death. But blessed is the watchful Christian; he shall be found amongst the overcomers, and shall partake of the rich variety of Divine favours which are contained in the epistles to the seven churches. Rev. ii. and iii.

Though the greatest part of a former discourse has been describing the blessedness of a watchful Christian in the hour of death, and in this I have set before you the sad consequences that attend sleepers (both which are powerful preservatives against drowsiness) yet at the conclusion of this sermon give me leave to add a few more motives to the duty of watchfulness, for we cannot be too well guarded against the danger of spiritual sloth and security.

Motive 1. Our natures, at best, in the present state, are too much inclined to slumber. We are too ready to fall asleep hourly: all the saints on earth, even the most lively and active of them, are not out of danger while they carry this flesh and blood about them. Indeed the best of Christians here below dwell but as it were in twilight, and in some sense they may be described as persons between sleeping and waking in comparison of the world of spirits. We behold Divine things here but darkly, and exert our spiritual faculties only in a feeble manner: it is only in the other world that we are broad awake, and in the perfect and unrestrained exercise of our vital powers; there only the complete life and vigour of a saint appears. In such a drowsy state then and in this dusky hour we cannot be too diligent in rousing ourselves, lest we sink down into dangerous slumbers. Besides, if we profess to be children of the light and of

the day and growing up to a brighter immortality, let us not sleep as do others who are the sons and daughters of night and darkness. 1 Thess. v. 4. 5.

Motive 2. Almost every thing around us in this world of sense and sin tends to lull us asleep again as soon as we begin to be awake. The busy or the pleasant scenes of this temporal life are ever calling away our thoughts from eternal things: they conceal from us the spiritual world, and close our eyes to God and things divine and heavenly. If the eye of the soul were but open to invisible things, what lively Christians should we be? but either the winds of worldly cares rock us to sleep, or the charms of worldly pleasures sooth us into deceitful slumbers. We are too ready to indulge earthly delights, and while we dream of pleasure in the creatures, we lose or at least abate our delights in God. Even the lawful satisfactions of flesh and sense, and the enticing objects round about us may attach our hearts so fast to them as to draw us down into a bed of carnal ease, till we fall asleep in spiritual security, and forget that we are made for heaven and that our hope and our home is on high.

Motive 3. Many thousands have been found sleeping at the call of Christ: some perhaps in a profound and deadly sleep, and others in an hour of dangerous slumber: many an acquaintance of ours has gone down to the grave when neither they nor we thought of their dying at such a season. But as thoughtless as they were, they were never the farther from the point of death: and we shudder with horror when we think what is become of their souls.

While we are young we are ready to please ourselves with the enjoyments of life, and flatter our hopes with a long succession of them. We suppose death to be at the distance of fifty or threescore miles; threescore years and ten is the appointed

period; but alas! how few are there whose hopes are fulfilled, or whose life is extended to those dimensions? Perhaps the messenger of death is within a furlong of our dwelling; a few more steps onward and he smites us down to the dust.

There are some beautiful verses which I have read perhaps thirty years ago, wherein the ingenious author describes the different stages of human life under the image of a fair prospect or landscape, and death is placed by mistaken mortals afar off beyond them all. Since the lines return now upon my remembrance, I will repeat them here with some small alteration. They are as follow:

Life and the scenes that round it rise,
Share in the same uncertainties;
Yet still we hug ourselves with vain presage
Of future days serene and long,
Of pleasures fresh and ever strong,
An active youth and slow declining age.

Like a fair prospect still we make
Things future pleasing forms to take;
First verdant meads arise and flow'ry fields;
Cool groves and shady copses here,
There brooks and winding streams appear,
While change of objects still new pleasure yields.

Farther fine castles court the eye,
There wealth and honours we espy;
Beyond, a huddled mixture fills the stage,
Till the remoter distance shrouds
The plains with hills, those hills with clouds,
There we place death behind old shivering age.

When death, alas, perhaps too nigh,
In the next hedge doth skulking lie,
There plants his engines, thence lets fly his dart,
Which while we ramble without fear,
Will stop us in our full career,
And force us from our airy dreams to part.

How fond and vain are our imaginations, when we have seen others called away on a sudden from the early scenes of life, to promise ourselves a long continuance here! We have the same feeble bodies, the same tabernacles of clay that others have, and we are liable to many of the same accidents or casualties: the same killing diseases are at work in our natures, and why should we imagine or presume that others should go so much before us?

And if we inquire of ourselves as to character or merit, or moral circumstances of any kind, and compare ourselves with those that are gone before, what foundation have we to promise ourselves a longer continuance here? Have we not the same sins or greater to provoke God? Are we more useful in the world than they, and do more service for his name? May not God summon us off the stage of life on a sudden as well as others? What are we better than they? Are we not as much under the sovereign disposal of the great God as any of our acquaintance who have been seized in the flower and prime of life, and called away in an unexpected hour? And what power have we to resist the seizure, or what promise to hope that God will delay longer? Let us, then, no more deceive ourselves with vain imaginations, but each of us awake and bestir ourselves, as though we were the next persons to be called away from this assembly, and to appear next before the Lord.

Motive 4. When we are awake we are not only fitter for the coming of our Lord to call us away by death, and fitter for his appearance to the great judgment, but we are better prepared also to attend him in every call to present duty, and more ready to meet his appearance in every providence. It is the Christian soldier who is ever awake and on his guard that is only fit for every sudden appointment

to new stations and services: he is more prepared for any post of danger and hazardous enterprise, and better furnished to sustain the roughest assaults. We shall be less shocked at sudden afflictions here on earth, if our souls keep heaven in view, and are ready winged for immortality. When we are fit to die we are fit to live also, and to do better service for God in whichsoever of his worlds he shall please to appoint our station. My business, O! Father, and my joy is to do thy will, among the sons of mortality, or among the spirits of the blessed on high.

Motive 5. Let us remember we have slept too long already in days past, and it is but a little while that we are called to watch. We have wore away too much of our life in sloth and drowsiness. The night is far spent with many of us, the day is at hand; "It is now high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed." Rom. xiii. 11, 12. Another hour or two, and the night will be at an end with us, Jesus the morning star is just appearing. What! can we not watch one hour? O happy souls that keep themselves awake to God in the midst of this dreaming world! Happy indeed when our Lord shall call us out of these dusky regions, and we shall answer his call with holy joy and spring upward to the inheritance of the saints in light! Then all the seasons of darkness and slumbering will be finished for ever: there is no need of laborious watchfulness in that world, where there is no flesh and blood to hang heavy upon the spirit; but the sanctified powers of the soul are all life, and immortal vigour. There is no want of the sun-beams to make their day-light or to irradiate that city; the glory of God enlightens it with divine splendours, and the Lamb is the light thereof: no inhabitant can sleep under such a united blaze of grace and glory: no faintings of

nature, no languors or weariness are found in all that vital climate; every citizen is for ever awake and busy under the beams of that glorious day; zeal, and love, and joy, are the springs of their eternal activity, and there is no night there.

DISCOURSE IV.

CHRIST ADMIRED AND GLORIFIED IN HIS SAINTS.

2 Thess. i. 10.

When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.

How mean and contemptible soever our Lord Jesus Christ might appear heretofore on earth, yet there is a day coming when he shall make a glorious figure in the sight of men and angels. How little soever the saints be esteemed in our day, and look poor and despicable in an ungodly world, yet there is an hour approaching when they shall be glorious beyond all imagination, and Christ himself shall be glorified in them. In that day shall the Lord our Saviour be the object of adoration and wonder, not among those of the sons of men that have believed on him, but before all the intellectual creation, and that upon the account of his grace manifested in his believers.

The natural inquiry that arises here is this, What particular instances of the grace of Christ in his saints

shall be the matter of our admiration and his glory in that day?

To this I shall propose an answer under the following particulars:

First, It is a matter of pleasing wonder, that persons of all characters should have been united in one faith and persuaded to trust in the same Saviour and embrace the same salvation; for some of all sorts shall stand in that blessed assembly. Then it shall be a fruitful spring of wonder and glory that men of various nations and ages, of different tempers, capacities, and interests, of contrary educations and contrary prejudices, should believe one gospel and trust in one deliverer from hell and death: that the sprightly, the studious and the stupid; the wise and the foolish should relish and rejoice in the same sublime truths not only concerning the true God, but also concerning Jesus the Redeemer; the barbarian and the Roman, the Greek and the Jew should approve and receive the same doctrines of salvation, that they should come into the same sentiments in the matters of religion, and live upon them as their only hope.

Astonishing spectacle! when the dark and savage inhabitants of Africa, and our forefathers the rugged and warlike Britons, from the end of the earth, shall appear in that assembly with some of the polite nations of Greece and Rome, and each of them shall glory in having been taught to renounce the gods of their ancestors, and the demons which they once worshipped, and shall rejoice in Jesus the King of Israel, and in Jehovah the everlasting God.

The conversion of the Gentile world to Christianity is a matter of glorious wonder, and shall appear to be so in that great day: that those who had been educated to believe many gods or no God at all, should renounce atheism and idolatry, and adore the true God only; and those that were taught to sacrifice to

idols and to atone for their own sins with the blood of beasts, should trust in one sacrifice and the atoning blood of the Son of God. Here shall stand a believing atheist, and there a converted idolater, as monuments of the almighty power of his grace.

There shall shine also in that assembly here and there a prince and a philosopher, though "not many wise, not many noble, not many mighty are called:" and they shall be matter of wonder and glory: that princes who love no control should bow their sceptres and their souls to the royalty and godhead of the poor man of Nazareth: that the heathen philosophers who have been used only to yield to reason should submit their understandings to divine revelation, even when it has something above the powers and discoveries of reason in it.

It shall raise our holy wonder too when we shall behold some of the Jewish priests and Pharisees who became converts to the Christian faith, adorning the triumph of that day. The Jewish Pharisees who expected a glorious temporal prince for their Messiah, that they should at last own the son of a carpenter for their teacher, their Saviour, and their king; that they should veil the pride of their souls and acknowledge a parcel of poor fishermen for his chief ministers of state, and receive them as ambassadors to the world. That those who thought they were righteous, and boasted in it, should renounce their boastings and their righteousness, and learn to expect salvation and life for themselves from the death and righteousness of another: that they who once called the cross of Christ folly and weakness, should come to see the wisdom and power of God in a crucified man, and believe him who hung upon a tree as an accursed creature to be Emanuel, God with us, God manifest in the flesh, and the Saviour of mankind.

"Surely," shall men and angels say in that day, "these were the effects of an Almighty power; it

was the work of God the Saviour, and it is marvellous in our eyes." With united voices shall all the saints confess, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this unto us, but the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ and of God the Father. We had perished in our folly, but Christ has been made wisdom to us; we were in darkness and lay under the shadow of death, but Christ has given us light." 1 Cor. i. 30. Eph. v. 14.

Come, all ye saints of these later ages, upon whom the ends of the world are come, raise your heads with me, and look far backwards even to the beginning of time and the days of Adam; for the believers of all ages as well as of all nations, shall appear together in that day, and acknowledge Jesus the Saviour: according to the brighter or darker discoveries of the age in which they lived, he has been the common object of their faith. Ever since he was called the seed of the woman till the time of his appearance in the flesh, all the chosen of God have lived upon his grace, though multitudes of them never knew his name. It is true, the greater part of that illustrious company on the right hand of Christ lived since the time of his incarnation (for the great multitude which no man could number is derived from the Gentile nation. Rev. vii. 9.) Yet the ancient patriarchs with the Jewish prophets and saints shall make a splendid appearance there: one hundred and forty-four thousand are sealed among the tribes of Israel: these of old embraced the gospel in types and shadows; but now their eyes behold Christ Jesus the substance and the truth. In the days of their flesh they read his name in dark lines, and looked through the long glass of prophecy to distant ages, and a Saviour to come, and now behold they find complete and certain salvation and glory in him. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and

embraced them. Heb. xi. 13. They died in the hope of this salvation, and they shall arise in the blessed possession of it.

Behold Abraham appearing there, the father of the faithful, who saw the day of Christ and rejoiced to see it, who trusted in his Son Jesus two thousand years before he was born: his elder family the pious Jews surround him there, and we his younger children among the Gentiles, shall stand with him as the followers of his faith, who trust in the same Jesus almost two thousand years after he is dead. How shall we both rejoice to see this brightest day of the Son of man, and congratulate each other's faith, while our eyes meet and centre in him and our souls triumph in the sight, and love, and enjoyment of him whom we believed! How admirable and divinely glorious shall our Lord himself appear, on whom every eye is fixed with unutterable delight, in whom the faith of distant countries and ages is centred and reconciled, and in whom all the nations of the earth appear to be blessed according to the ancient word of promise. Gen. xv. and xvii.

Secondly, It is a further occasion of pleasing wonder, that so many wicked obstinate wills of men and so many perverse affections should be bowed down and submit themselves to the holy rules of the gospel. This is another instance of the grace of Christ, and shall be the subject of our joyful admiration. Every son and daughter of Adam by nature is averse to God, inclined to sin, a child of disobedience and death. Eph. ii. 2. There is a new miracle wrought by Christ in every instance of converting grace, and he shall have the glory of them all in that day. It is a first resurrection from the dead, it is a new creation, and the Almighty power shall then be publicly adored.

Then one shall say, "I was a sensual sinner, drenched in liquor and unclean lusts, and wicked

in all the forms of lewdness and intemperance: the grace of God my Saviour appeared to me and taught me to deny worldly lusts, which I once thought I could never have parted with. I loved my sins as my life, but he has persuaded and constrained me to cut off my right hand, and to pluck out a right eye, and to part with my darling vices; and behold me here a monument of his saving mercy.

I was envious against my neighbour, (shall another say) and my temper was malice and wrath; revenge was mingled with my constitution, and I thought it no iniquity: but I bless the name of Christ my Redeemer, who in the day of his grace turned my wrath into meekness; he inclined me to love even my enemies, and to pray for them that cursed me; he taught me all this by his own example, and he made me learn it by the sovereign influences of his Spirit. I am a wonder to myself, when I think what once I was: amazing change and Almighty grace!"

Then a third shall confess, "I was a profane wretch, a swearer, a blasphemer: I hoped for no heaven and I feared no hell; but the Lord seized me in the midst of my rebellions, and sent his arrows into my soul; he made me feel the stings of an awakened conscience, and constrained me to believe there was a God and a hell, till I cried out, What shall I do to be saved? Then he led me to partake of his own salvation, and from a proud rebellious infidel he has made me a penitent and an humble believer, and here I stand to show forth the wonders of his grace and the boundless extent of his forgiveness."

A fourth shall stand up and acknowledge in that day, "And I was a poor carnal covetous creature who made this world my God, and abundance of money was my heaven; but he cured me of this

vile idolatry of gold, taught me how to obtain treasures in the heavenly world, and to forsake all on earth that I might have an inheritance there; and behold he has not disappointed my hope: I am now made rich indeed, and I must for ever speak his praises."

There shall be no doubt or dispute in that day, whether it was the power of our own will, or the superior power of divine grace that wrought the blessed change, that turned a lion into a lamb, a grovelling earth-worm into a bird of paradise, and of a covetous or malicious sinner made a meek and a heavenly saint. The grace of Christ shall be so conspicuous in every glorified believer in that assembly, that with one voice they shall all shout to the praise and glory of his grace; "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to thy name be all the honour." Psalm cxv. 1.

Thirdly, It shall be the matter of our wonder, and the glory of Christ in that day, that so many thousand guilty wretches should be made righteous by one righteousness, cleansed in one laver from all their iniquities and sprinkled unto pardon and sanctification with the blood of one man Jesus Christ. See the "great multitude that no man can number," Rev. vii. 9, 10. They all "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," ver. 14.

It is a matter of wonder to us now on earth, that the blessed Son of God who is one with the Father, should stoop so low as to unite himself to a mortal nature, that he should become a poor despicable man, and pass through a life of sufferings and sorrows, and die an accursed death to redeem us from guilt and deserved misery: but when we shall see him in his native glory and lustre, his acquired dignities and all the honours of heaven heaped

upon him, it will raise our wonder high to think that such a one should once humble himself to the death of the cross, the death of the vilest slave, that he might save our souls from dying; that he should pour out his own blood to wash off the stains of millions of sins, that we might appear righteous before a God of holiness. Then shall the multitude of the saved join in that song, "To him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever," Rev. i. 5, 6. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and honour, for thou hast redeemed us with thy blood from every kindred, tribe, and nation." Rev. v.

Then shall those blessed words of scripture appear and shine in full glory, howsoever they are often passed over in silence and too much forgotten in our age. Rom. v. 17, 19, 21. "If by one man's offence, death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners: so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." Then shall our blessed Lord shine in the complete lustre of that incommunicable name, JEHOVAH TZIDKENU, "The Lord our righteousness." Jer. xxiii. 6.

And not only the atonement and salvation itself shall be the subject of our glorious admiration, but the way and manner how sinners partake of it shall minister further to our wonder and to the glory of Christ. That such a world of poor miserable creatures should be saved from hell by believing or trusting in grace when they could never be saved by all their own works: that they should obtain righteousness and acceptance unto eternal

life by an humble penitence and poverty of spirit depending on the death and righteousness of another, when all their labour and toil in works of the law could not make up a righteousness of their own sufficient to appear before the justice of God; Christ will not only be glorified in their holiness as saints, but admired and honoured in and by their faith as believers. His blood and his grace shall share all the glory. "Therefore it is of faith, and not of works, that it might be of grace." Rom. iv. 15. Yet this saving faith is the spring of shining holiness in every believer. Duties and virtues are not left out of our religion when faith is brought into it. The graces of the saints join happily with the atonement of Christ to render that day more illustrious.

Fourthly, That a company of such feeble Christians should maintain their course towards heaven through so many thousand obstacles: this shall be another subject of admiration, and yield a further revenue of glory to our Lord Jesus Christ; for he who is their "righteousness is their strength also," Isa. xlv. 24, 25. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel glory in that day as their strength and their salvation. They have broke through all their difficulties, and "were able to do all things through Christ strengthening them," Phil. iv. 13.

Behold that noble army with palms in their hands: once they were weak warriors, yet they overcame mighty enemies, and have gained the victory and the prize: enemies rising from earth and from hell to tempt and to accuse them, but "they overcame by the blood of the Lamb." Rev. xii. 7, 11. What a divine honour shall it be to our Lord Jesus Christ, the captain of our salvation, that weak Christians should subdue their strong corruptions and get safe to heaven through a thousand oppositions within and without: it is all owing to the grace of Christ,

that grace which is all-sufficient for every saint. 2 Cor. xii. 9: "They are made more than conquerors through him that has loved them." Rom. viii. 38.

Then shall the faith and courage and patience of the saints have a blessed review; and it shall be told before the whole creation what strife and wrestlings a poor believer has passed through in a dark cottage, a chamber of long sickness, or perhaps in a dungeon; how he has there combated with powers of darkness, how he has struggled with huge sorrows; and has been often in heaviness through manifold temptations. Then shall appear the bright scene which St. Peter represents as the event of sore trials. 1 Pet. i. 6, 7. When our faith has been tried in the fire of tribulation and is found more precious than gold, it shall shine to the praise, honour, and glory of the suffering saints, and of Christ himself at his appearance.

Behold that illustrious troop of martyrs, and some among them of the feebler sex and of tender age: now that women should grow bold in faith, even in the sight of torments, and children with a manly courage should profess the name of Christ in the face of angry and threatening rulers; that some of these should become undaunted confessors of the truth, and others triumph in fire and torture, these things shall be matter of glory to Christ in that day: it was his power that gave them courage and victory in martyrdom and death. Every Christian there, every soldier in that triumphing army shall ascribe his conquest to the grace of his Lord his leader, and lay down all their trophies at the feet of his Saviour with humble acknowledgment and shouts of honour.

Almost all the saved number were at some part of their lives weak in faith, and yet by the grace of Christ they held out to the end, and are crowned. "I was a poor trembling creature," shall one say, "but I was confirmed in my faith and holiness by the gospel of

Christ, or I rested on a naked promise, and found support because Christ was there; and he shall have the glory of it." "In him are all the promises, yea, and in him Amen, to the glory of his Father," 2 Cor. i. 20, 21, 22, and the Son shall share in this glory, for he died to ratify these promises and he lives to fulfil them.

"Oh what an almighty arm is this," shall the believer say, "that has borne up so many thousands of poor sinking creatures and lifted their heads above the waves?" The spark of grace that lived many years in a flood of temptations and was not quenched, shall then shine bright to the glory of Christ, who kindled and maintained it. When we have been brought through all the storms and the threatening seas, and yet the raging waves have been forbid to swallow us up, we shall cry out in raptures of joy and wonder, "What manner of man is this that the winds and the seas have obeyed him?"

Then shall it be gloriously evident that he has conquered Satan and kept the hosts of hell in chains, when it shall appear that he has made poor mean trembling believers victorious over all the powers of darkness, for the Prince of peace has bruised him under their feet.

Fifthly, There is more work for our wonder and joy, and more glory for our blessed Lord, when we shall see that so many dark and dreadful providences were working together in mercy for the good of the saints: it is because Jesus Christ had the management of them all put into his hand; and we shall acknowledge "he has done all things well." Rom. viii. 28: "All things have wrought together for good." It is the voice of Christ to every saint in sorrow, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." John xiii. 7. I saw not then, saith the Christian, that my Lord was curing my pride by such a threatening and abasing

providence, that he was weaning my heart from sensual delights by such a sharp and painful wound; but now I behold things in another light and give thanks and praises to my divine physician.

We shall look back upon the hours of our impatience and be ashamed; we shall chide the flesh for its old repinings, when we shall stand upon the eternal hills of paradise and cast our eyes backward upon yonder transactions of time, those past ages of complaint and infirmity. We shall then with pleasure and thankfulness confess that the Captain of our salvation was much in the right to lead us through so many sufferings and sorrows, and we were much in the wrong to complain of his conduct.

Bear up your spirits then, ye poor afflicted distressed souls, who are wrestling through difficult providences all in the dark; bear up but a little longer: he that shall come will come, and will not tarry: he will set all his conduct in a fair light, and you shall say, "Blessed be the Lord and all his government."

Sixthly, That heaven should be so well filled out of such a hell of sin and misery as this world is, shall be another delightful reflection full of wonder and glory. Take a short survey of mankind, how "all flesh has corrupted its ways before God, and every imagination of the thought of man's heart is only evil, and that continually; there is none righteous; no, not one." Look round about you and see how iniquity abounds, violence, oppression, pride, lust, sensualities of all kinds, how they reign among the children of men: religion is lost and God forgotten in the world; and yet out of this wretched world Christ has provided inhabitants for heaven, where nothing can enter that defileth. Look into your own hearts, ye sinners; see what hell lies there, and ye converts of the grace of Christ, look into your hearts, too, and see how many of the seeds of

wickedness still lie hid there; how much corruption and how little holiness; look inward, and wonder that Christ should ever fit you for heaven by his converting and sanctifying grace.

Look round the world again and survey the miseries of this earth; as many calamities as there are creatures, and perhaps ten times more: who is there on earth without his sorrows? and sometimes a multitude of them meet in one single sufferer: see how toil, and weariness, and disappointment, poverty, and sickness, pain, and anguish, and vexation, are distributed through this world, that lies on the borders of hell: see all this, and wonder at the grace of Christ that has taken a colony out of this miserable world and made a heaven of it.

We shall many of us be a wonder to each other as well as to ourselves, and we shall all review and admire the grace of Christ in and towards us all. Among the rest there are two sort of Christians whose salvation shall be a special matter of wonder, and these are the melancholy and uncharitable. The melancholy Christian shall wonder that ever such a sinner as himself was brought to heaven; and the uncharitable shall wonder how such a sinner as his neighbour came there. The poor doubting melancholy soul, who was full of fears lest he should be condemned, shall then have full assurance that he is elected and redeemed, pardoned and saved, when he sees, hears, and feels the salvation and the glory upon him, within him, and all around him, and he shall admire and adore the grace of God his Saviour. The narrow-souled Christian who said his neighbour would be damned for want of some party-notions, or for some lesser failings, shall confess his uncharitable mistake, and shall wonder at the abounding mercy of Christ, which has pardoned those errors in his neighbour for which he had excommunicated and condemned him. Both these Christians in that day, I mean, the timorous and the censorious, shall stand at

his right hand as monuments of his surprising grace who forgave one the defects of his faith and the other his want of love; and their souls and their tongues shall join together to rejoice in the Lord, and their spirits shall magnify their God and Redeemer: Christ shall have his due revenue of glory from both in the hour of their public salvation.

O what honour shall it add to the everflowing mercy of Christ, what joy and wonder to all the saints to see Paul the persecutor and blasphemer there, and Peter who denied the Lord that bought him, and Mary Magdalene, that impure sinner! See what a foul and shameful catalogue, what children of iniquity, are at last made heirs and possessors of heaven. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11. The fornicators and idolaters, the thieves and the covetous, the drunkards, the revilers and the extortioners. Such they were in the days of ignorance and heathenism, fit fuel for the fire of hell; and in those circumstances they are utterly excluded from the kingdom of God, but now they find a place in that blessed assembly; and the converting grace of Christ is admired and glorified.

Is the blessed Jesus a great Prophet and the Teacher of his church? These are the persons that could turn such sinners into saints. O surprising scene of rich salvation, when these Corinthian converts, washed in the blood of Christ and renewed by his Spirit, shall appear in their white garments of holiness and glory! There is not one sinful creature to be found in all the vast retinue of the holy Jesus. But there are thousands who have been once great criminals, notorious sinners, and have been snatched by the arm of divine love as brands out of the burning. What an affecting sight will it be when we shall behold all the members of Christ united to their Head, and complete in glory, and see at the same time a world of vile sinners doomed to destruction! With what adoration and wonder shall we cry out, "And such were some of these happy ones, but they

are sanctified, but they are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," Psa. cxv. 1: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to" God our Saviour be eternal honour.

In the seventh place, There is another glory and wonder added to this illustrious scene, and gives honour to our blessed Saviour; and that is, that so many vigorous, beautiful, and immortal bodies should be raised at once out of the dust, with all their old infirmities left behind them: not one ache or pain, not one weakness or disease among all the glorified millions: as the Israelites came out of their bondage in Egypt, so shall the army of saints from the prison of the grave, "and not one feeble among them." Psal. cv. 37. This is the work of Christ the Creator and the healer.

Here I might run many sorrowful divisions, and travel over the large and thorny field of sickness and pains that attend human nature, those unborn mischiefs that vex poor Christians in this state of trial and suffering. But these were all buried when the body went to the grave, and they are buried for ever; he that hath the keys of death shall let the bodies of his saints out of prison; but no gout nor stone, no infirmity nor distemper, no head-ach nor heart-ache shall ever attend them. The body was "sown in weakness, but it is raised in power; it was sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory," through the power of the second Adam and his quickening Spirit. 1 Cor. xv. 43, 45. Rom. viii. 11.

Then shall Christ appear to be Sovereign and Lord of death, when such an endless multitude of old and new captives are released at his word, and the grave has restored its prey; when those bodies which have been turned into dust some thousands of years, and their atoms scattered abroad by the winds of heaven shall be raised again in glory and dignity to meet their descending Lord in the air.

Surely Jesus in that day shall be acknowledged as a Sovereign of nature, when at the word of his command a new creation shall arise all perfect and immortal.

It will add yet further glory to Christ when we remember what fruitful seeds of iniquity were lodged in that flesh and blood which we wore on earth, and which we laid down in the tomb, and when at the same time we survey our glorified bodies, how spiritual, how holy, how happily fitted for the service of glorified souls made perfect in holiness. How did all the saints once complain of a law in their members that warred against the law of their minds, and brought them into bondage to the law of sin? But this law of sin is now for ever abolished, this bondage dissolved and broken, and these members are all new-created for instruments of righteousness to serve God in his temple for ever and ever. Holy Paul shall no more groan in a sinful tabernacle, he shall no more complain of that flesh wherein no good thing dwelt, he shall cry out no more, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?"

Many and bitter have been the sorrows of a holy soul in this world, because of the perverse dispositions of animal nature and the flesh: but none of the saints in that assembly shall ever feel again the stings of inward envy, the pricking thorns of peevishness, or the wild ferments of wrath and passion: none of them shall ever find those unruly appetites which wrought so strongly in their old flesh and blood, and too often overpowered their unwilling souls; those appetites which brought their consciences sometimes under fresh guilt, and filled them with inward reproaches, and agonies of spirit. These evil principles are all destroyed by death, they are lost in the grave, and shall have no resurrection. The new-raised bodies of the righteous in that day shall be completely obedient to the dictates of their

spirits without any vicious juices to make reluctance, or perverse humours to raise an inward rebellion: and not only so, but perhaps even our bodies shall have some active holy tendencies wrought in them so far as corporeal nature can administer towards the sacred exercises of a glorified saint. A sweet and blessed change indeed! And Jesus, who raised these bodies in this beauty of holiness, shall receive the glory of this divine work.

The last instance I shall mention wherein Christ shall be admired in his saints, is this: They shall appear in that day as so many images of his person and as so many monuments of the success of his office.

Is the blessed Jesus a great Prophet and the Teacher of his church? These are the persons that have learnt his divine doctrine, they have heard the joyful sound of his gospel, and the holy truths of it are copied out in their hearts. These are the disciples of his school; and by his word and by his Spirit they have been taught to know God and their Saviour, and they have been trained up in the way to eternal life.

Is Jesus a great high priest both of sacrifice and intercession? Behold all these souls, an endless number, purified from their defilements by the blood of his cross, washed and made white in that blessed laver, and reconciled to God by his atoning sacrifice; behold the power of his intercession in securing millions from the wrath of God, and in procuring for them every divine blessing. He has obtained for each of them grace and glory.

Is Jesus the Lord of all things and the King of his church? Behold his subjects waiting on him, a numerous and a loyal multitude, who have the laws of their King engraven on their souls. These are the sons and daughters of Adam whom he has rescued by his power from the kingdom of darkness

and the hands of the devil: he has guarded them from the rage of their malicious adversaries in earth and hell, and brought them safe through all difficulties to behold the glories of this day, and to celebrate the honours of their King.

Is he the Captain of salvation? See what a blessed army he has listed under his banner of love; and they have followed him through all the dangers of life and time under his conduct. These are the chosen, the called, the faithful. They have sustained many a sharp conflict, many a dreadful battle, and they are at last "made more than conquerors through him that has loved them." They attribute all their victories to the wisdom, the goodness and the power of their divine Leader, and even stand amazed at their own success against such mighty adversaries: but they fought under the banner, conduct, and influence, of the Prince of Life, the King of righteousness, who is always victorious, and has a crown in his hand for every conqueror.

Is Jesus the great example of his saints? Behold the virtues and graces of the Son of God copied out in all his followers. As he was, so were they in this world, holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners: as he now is, so are they, glorious in holiness and divinely beautiful, while each of them reflects the image of their blessed Lord, and they appear as wonders to all the beholding world. They were unknown here on earth even as Christ himself was unknown: this is the day appointed to reveal their works and their graces. Jesus is the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person; and all the sons and daughters of God shall then appear as so many pictures of the blessed Jesus drawn by the finger of the eternal Spirit.

And not their souls only, but their glorified bodies also are framed in his likeness. What grace and

grandeur dwell in each countenance! As thou art, O blessed Jesus, so shall they be in that day, all of them resembling the children of a king! Vigour and health, beauty and immortality shine and reign throughout all that blessed assembly. The adopted sons and daughters of God resemble the original and only-begotten Son; Christ will have all his brethren and sisters conformed unto his glories, that they may be known to be his kindred, the children of his Father, and that he may appear the first-born among many brethren. When the Son of God breaks open the graves, he forms the dust of his saints by the model of his own glorious aspect and figure, "and changes their vile bodies into the likeness of his own glorious body by that power whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself." Phil. iii. ult. He shall be admired as the bright original, and each of the saints as a fair and glorious copy: the various beauties that are dispersed among all that assembly are summed up and united in himself: he is the chiefest among ten thousands and altogether lovely. One sun in the firmament can point his own bright image at once upon a thousand reflecting glasses, or mirrors of gold: what a dazzling lustre would arise from such a scene of reflections! But what superior and inexpressible glory, above all the power of similitude and beyond the reach of comparison, shall irradiate the world on that day, when Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, shall shine upon all his saints, and find each of them well prepared to receive his lustre, and to reflect it round the creation; each of them displaying the image of the original Son of God, and confessing all their virtues and their graces, all their beauties and glories both of soul and body to be nothing else but mere copies and derivations from Jesus, the first and fairest image of the Father!

USE.

The doctrines and works of divine grace are full of wonder and glory; such is the person and offices of Christ, such are his holy and faithful followers, and such eminently will be the blessed scene at his appearance. In the foregoing part of the discourse we have briefly surveyed some of those glorious wonders. We now come to consider what use may be made of such a theme.

Use 1. It gives us eminently these two lessons of instruction:

Lesson 1. How mistaken is the judgment of flesh and sense in the things that relate to Christ and his saints. The Son of God himself was abused and scorned by the blind world; they esteemed him as one smitten of God and unbeloved, and they saw no beauty or comeliness in him. Isa. iii. 23. He was poor and despised all his life, and he was doomed to the death of a criminal and a slave. As for the saints, they find no more honour or esteem among men than their Lord; they are many times called and counted "the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things," 1 Cor. iv. 14. This is the judgment of flesh and sense.

But when the great appointed hour is come, and Jesus shall return from heaven "with a shout of the archangel and the trump of God," when he shall call up his saints from their beds of dust and darkness, and make the graves resign those prisoners of hope, when they shall all gather together around their Lord, a bright and numerous army, shining, and reflecting the splendours of his presence, how will the judgment of flesh and sense be confounded at once, and reversed with shame! "Is this the man that was loaded with scandal, that was buffeted with scorn, and scourged and crucified in the land

of Judea! Is this the person that hung on the cursed tree, and expired under agonies of pain and sorrow? Amazing sight! How majestic, how divine his appearance! The Son of God and the King of glory! And are these the men that were made the mockery of the world? That wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins in dens and caves of the earth? Surprising appearance! How illustrious! How full of glory! O that such a meditation might awaken us to judge more by faith."

Lesson 2. The next lesson that we may derive from the text is this, (viz.) "One great design of the day of judgment is to advance and publish the glory of Christ." He shall come on purpose to be glorified in his saints; the whole creation was made by him and for him; the transactions of providence, grace, and justice, are managed for his honour; and the joyful and terrible affairs of the day of judgment are designed to display the majesty and the power of Jesus the King, the wisdom and equity of Jesus the Judge, and the grace and truth of Jesus the Saviour. I will grant indeed that the appointment of this day is partly intended for the glory of Christ in the just destruction of the impenitent, for he will be glorified in pouring out the vengeance of his Father upon rebellious sinners: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power," ver. 7, 8, 9, before my text. But his sweetest and most valuable revenue of glory arises from among his saints.

If the messengers of the churches are called the glory of Christ, with all the weaknesses and sins and follies that attend the best of them here, as in 2 Cor. viii. 23, much more shall they be his glory hereafter

when they shall have no spot nor blemish found upon them, and the work of Christ upon their souls has formed and finished them in the perfect beauty of holiness. The saints shall reflect glory on each other, and all of them reflect supreme lustre on Christ their head: the people shall be the crown and glory of the minister in that day, and the minister shall be the joy and glory of the people, and both shall be the crown, joy, and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20. 2 Cor. i. 14. 2 Thess. i. 12. He shall appear high on a throne in the midst of that bright assembly and say, "Father, these are thy sheep that thou hast given me in the counsels of thine eternal love; all these I have ransomed from hell at the price of my own blood, these have I rescued by my grace from the dominion of sin and the devil, I have formed them unto holiness and fitted them for heaven, I have kept them by my power through all the dangers of their mortal state, and have brought them safe to thy celestial kingdom: "All thine are mine, and all mine are thine: I was glorified in them on earth," John xviii. 10, and they are now my everlasting crown and glory.

Then shall the unknown worlds that never fell, worlds of angels and innocent creatures, and the world of guilty devils and condemned rebels stand and wonder together at the recovery and salvation Christ has provided for the fallen sons of Adam. They shall stand amazed to see the millions of apostate creatures, the inhabitants of this earthly globe recovered to their duty and allegiance by the Son of God going down to dwell amongst them; millions of impure and deformed souls restored to the divine image and made beautiful as angels by the grace and Spirit of our Lord Jesus. Those spectators shall be filled with admiration and transport to see such a multitude of criminals pardoned and justified for the sake of a righteousness which they themselves

never wrought, and accepted as righteous in the sight of God by a covenant of grace unknown to other worlds, and by faith in the great Mediator. They shall wonder to see such an innumerable company of polluted wretches washed from their sins in so precious a laver as the blood of God's own Son: and he that hung upon the cross as a spectacle of wretchedness at Jerusalem, shall entertain the superior and inferior worlds with the sight of his adorable and divine glories, and the spoils he has brought from the regions of death and hell. Thus to the principalities and powers in heavenly places shall be made known by the church triumphant the manifold wisdom and the manifold grace of God the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ. Eph. iii. 10.

But tremble, oh ye obstinate and impenitent wretches! ye sensual sinners, ye infidels of a Christian name and nation, Christ will be glorified in you one way or another; if your hearts are not bowed and melted to receive his gospel, you shall be punished with everlasting destruction among those that know not God and obey not the gospel of his Son.

Tremble, ye sensual and ye profane sons of iniquity, when ye remember this day, when ye shall see the holy souls that ye scorned, with crowns on their heads and palms in their hands, with the shout of victory and joy on their tongues, and the God-man whom ye despised and whose grace ye neglected, shining at the head of that bright assembly.

Tremble, ye infidels, ye despisers of the name of a crucified Christ; behold his cross has become a throne, and his crown of thorns a crown of glory: see the man whom ye have scorned and reproached at the head of millions of angels, and adored by ten thousand times ten thousand saints, while wicked princes and captains, armies and nations of sinners wait their doom from his mouth, nor dare hope for

a word of his mercy. O make haste, and come and be reconciled to him, and to God by him, that ye may belong to that blessed assembly, that ye may bear a part in the triumphs of that day, and that Christ may be glorified in your recovery from the very borders of damnation.

This thought leads me to the next use.

II. This discourse gives rich encouragement to the greatest sinners to hope for mercy, and to the weakest saints to hope for victory and salvation. Such sort of subjects of the grace of Christ shall yield him some of the brightest rays of glory at the last day. Yet, sinners, let me charge you here never to hope for this happiness without solemn repentance and an entire change of heart unto holiness, for an unholy soul would be a fearful blemish in that assembly and a disgrace to our Lord Jesus. Christians, I would charge you also never to hope for the happiness of this day without battle and conquest, for all the members of that assembly must be overcomers; but where there is a hearty desire and longing after grace and salvation, let not the worst of sinners despair, nor the weakest believer let go his hope; for it is such as you and I are in whom Christ will be magnified in that day.

Believe this, oh thou humbled and convinced sinner, who complainest thy heart is hard, though thou wouldest fain repent and mourn; who fearest the bonds of thy corruptions are so strong that they shall never be broken, believe that the sovereign grace of Christ has designed to exalt itself in the sanctification of such unholy souls as thou art, and in melting such hard hearts as thine. And thou, poor trembling soul, that wouldst fain trust in a Saviour, but art afraid, because of the greatness of thy guilt and thine abounding iniquities, believe this, that where sin has abounded, grace has much

more abounded: it is from the bringing such sinners as thou art to heaven, that the choicest revenues of glory shall arise to our Lord Jesus Christ, and thy acclamations of joy and honour to the Saviour shall perhaps be loudest in that day, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe.

Read 1 Timothy i. 13, 14, 15, and 16, and see there what an account the great apostle gives of his own conversion: "I was a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious, yet I obtained mercy; and the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith, and love which is in Jesus Christ." Now I am sent to publish and preach to blasphemers and persecutors, that "this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

Turn to another text, ye feeble believers, 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10; there you shall find the same apostle a convert and a Christian, but too weak to conflict with the messenger of Satan that buffeted him, nor able to release himself from that sore temptation that lay heavy upon him; but having received a word from Christ that his grace was sufficient, and that his strength was to shine perfect in glory in the midst of our weakness, the apostle encourages himself to a joyful hope. Now, says he, I can even glory in my infirmities (so far as they are without sin) that the power of Christ may rest upon me; when I am weak in myself, I am strong in the Lord.

Are not the most diseased patients the chief honours of the physician who healed them? And must not these appear eminently in that day when he displays to the sight of the world the noblest monuments

of his healing power! When cripples and invalids gain over mighty enemies, is not the skill and conduct of their leader most admired? You are the persons then in whom Christ will be glorified, be of good cheer, receive his offered grace, and wait for his salvation.

III. The next use I shall make of this discourse is to draw a word of advice from it. Learn to despise those honours and ornaments in this world in which Christ shall have no share in the world to come. I do not say, cast them all away, for many things are needful in this life that can have no immediate regard to the other; but learn to despise them and set light by them, because they reach no farther than time, and shall be forgotten in eternity. Never put the higher esteem on yourselves or your neighbours because of the gay glitterings of silk or silver; nor let these employ your eyes and your thoughts in the time of worship when the things of the future world should fill up your attention; nor let them entertain your tongues in your friendly visits, so as to exclude the discourse of divine ornaments and the glorious appearance of our Lord Jesus.

When I am to put on my best attire, let me consider, if I am hung round with jewels and gold, these must perish before that solemn day, or melt in the last great burning; they can add no beauty to me in that assembly. If I put on love, and faith, and humility, I shall shine in these hereafter, and Christ shall have some rays of glory from them. O may your souls and mine be dressed in those graces which are "ornaments of great price in the sight of God!" 1 Peter, iii. 3, 4. Such as may command the respect of angels, and reflect honour upon Christ in that solemnity.

I confess we dwell in flesh and blood, and human nature in the best of us is too much impressed by things sensible: when we see a train of human pomp

and grandeur, and long ranks of shining garments and equipage, it is ready to dazzle our eyes and attract our hearts: vain pomp and poor equipage all this, when compared with the triumph of our blessed Lord at his appearance with an endless army of his holy ones; where every saint shall be vested (not in silks and gold) but in robes of refined light outshining the sun, such as Christ himself wore in the mount of transfiguration. Millions of suns in one firmament of glory. Think on that day and the illustrious retinue of our Lord: think on that splendour that shall attract the eyes of heaven and earth, shall confound the proud sinner, and astonish the inhabitants of hell: such a meditation as this will cast a dim shadow over the brightest appearance of a court or a royal festival; it will spread a dead colouring over all the painted vanities of this life; it will damp every thought of rising ambition and earthly pride, and we shall have but little heart to admire or wish for any of the vain shows of mortality. Methinks every gaudy scene of the present life, and all the gilded honours and armies would grow faint and fade away and vanish at the meditation of this illustrious appearance.

IV. This text will give us also two hints of caution.

First. You that are rich in this world, or wise, or mighty, dare not ridicule nor scoff at those poor weak Christians in whom Christ shall be admired and glorified in the last day. You that fancy you have any advantages of birth or beauty, of mind or body here on earth, dare not make a jest of your poor pious neighbours that want them, for he is one of those persons whom Christ calls his glory, and he himself has given you warning lest you incur his resentment on this account, Matt. xviii. 6: "Whoso shall offend one of those little ones which

believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." Perhaps the good man has some blemish in his outward form, or it may be his countenance is dejected, or his mien and figure awkward and uncomely; perhaps his garments sit wrong and unfashionable upon him, or it may be they hang in tatters; the motions of his body perhaps are ungraceful, his speech improper, and his deportment is simple and unpolished; but he has shining graces in his soul in which Christ shall be admired in the last day, and how darest thou make him thy laughing-stock? Wilt thou be willing to hear thy scornful jest repeated again at that day, when the poor derided Christian has his robes of glory on, and the Judge of all shall acknowledge him for one of his favourites?

The second hint of caution is this: You that shall be the glory of Christ in that day dare not do any thing that may dishonour him now. Walk answerably to your character and your hope, nor indulge the least sinful defilement. Say within yourselves, "Am I to make one in that splendid retinue of my Lord, where every one must appear in robes of holiness, and shall I spot my garments with the flesh? When I am provoked to anger and indignation, let me say, Doth wrath and bluster become a follower and an attendant of the meek and peaceful Jesus? When I am tempted to pride and vanity of mind, will this be a beauty or a blemish to that assembly that shines in glorious humility? Or perhaps I am wavering and ready to yield and become a captive to some foolish temptation; but how then can I expect a place in that holy triumph which is appointed for none but conquerors? And how shall I be able to look my blessed General in the face in that day, if I prove a coward under his banner and

abandon my profession of strict holiness at the demand of a sinful and threatening world?"

V. The last use I shall make of the text is matter of consolation and joy to two sorts of Christians.

First, To the poor, mean, and despised followers of Christ, and in whom Christ himself is despised by the ungodly world: read my text, and believe that in you Christ shall be glorified and admired, when with a million of angels he shall descend from heaven and make his last appearance upon earth: mean as you are in your own esteem because of your ignorance and your weakness in this world, you shall be one of the glories of Christ in the world to come: little and despicable as you are in the esteem of proud sinners, they shall behold your Lord exalted on his throne, and you sitting among the honours at his right hand, while they shall rage afar off and gnash their teeth at your glory: when the eye of faith is open, it can spy this bright hour at a distance, and bid the mourning Christian rejoice in hope.

Secondly, There is comfort also in my text to those who mourn for the dishonour of Christ in the world; those lively members of the mystical body who sympathize with the blessed Head under all the reproaches that are cast upon him and his gospel, who groan under the load of scandal that is thrown upon Christ in an infidel age, as though it were personally thrown upon themselves. It is a matter of lamentation indeed that there are but few of this sort of Christians in our day, few that love our Lord Jesus with such tenderness; but if such there be among you, open your eyes and look forward to this glorious day. This day to which Enoch the first of all the prophets, and John the last of all the apostles directs our faith. Read their own words, Jude xiv. 15; Rev. i. 7: "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all

their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoke against him.—Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." Bear up your hearts, ye mourners, and support your hopes with the promise of our Lord. "Again a little while, and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the throne of his glory." Matt. xxv. 31. Then shall your heart rejoice in his honours and in your own, and this "joy no man taketh from you." John xvi. 19, 22. And while he repeats this promise with his last words in the Bible, "Surely I come quickly," let every soul of us echo to the voice of our Beloved, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

DISCOURSE V.

THE WRATH OF THE LAMB.

REV. vi. 15, 16, 17.

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free-man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains: And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

WHEN some terrible judgment or execution of divine vengeance is denounced against an age or a nation, it is sometimes described in the language of prophecy by a resemblance to the last and great judgment-day, when all mankind shall have to account for their sins, and the just and final indignation of God shall be executed upon obstinate and unrepenting criminals. The discourse of our Saviour in the 24th of Matthew, is an eminent example of this kind where the destruction of the Jewish na-

tion is predicted, together with the final judgment of the world, in such uniform language and similar phrases of speech, that it is difficult to say whether both these scenes of vengeance run through the whole discourse, or which part of the discourse belongs to the one, and which to the other. The same manner of prophecy appears in this text.

Learned interpreters suppose these words to foretell the universal consternation which was found amongst the heathen idolaters and persecutors of the church of Christ when Constantine the first Christian emperor was raised to the throne of Rome and became Governor of the world. But whether they hit upon the proper application of this prophecy or not, yet still it is pretty evident that this scene of terror is borrowed from the last judgment, which will eminently appear to be the "day of wrath," as it is called, Rom. ii. 5. It is the great day of divine indignation in so eminent a manner, that all the tremendous desolations of kingdoms and people from the creation of the world to the consummation of all things, shall be but as shadows of that day of terror and vengeance.

I shall therefore consider these words at present as they contain a solemn representation of that last glorious and dreadful day; and here I shall inquire particularly, (1.) Who are the persons whose aspect and appearance shall then be so dreadful to sinners. (2.) How comes the wrath which discovers itself at that time to be formidable; and (3.) How vain will the shifts and hopes of sinners be in that dreadful day to avoid the wrath and vengeance.

First, Who are the persons that appear clothed in so much terror?

Answer. It is he that sits upon the throne and the Lamb: it is God the Father of all, the great and Almighty Creator, the supreme Lord and Governor

of the world, and the Lamb of God, i. e. our Lord Jesus Christ his Son, dwelling in human nature, to whom the judgment of the world is committed, and by whom the Father will introduce the terrible and the illustrious scenes of that day, and manage the important and eternal affairs of it. It is by these names that the apostle John in this prophetical book describes God the Father, and his Son Jesus. Rev. iv. 10, and v. 6—13.

If it be inquired, why God the Father is described as the person sitting on the throne, this is plainly agreeable to the other representations of him throughout the scripture, where he is described as first and supreme in authority, as sitting on the throne of majesty on high, as denoting and commissioning the Lord Jesus, his well-beloved Son, to act for him, and as placing him on his throne to execute his works of mercy or vengeance. Rev. iii. 21: "He that overcometh shall sit down with me on my throne, saith our Saviour, even as I have overcome and am set down with the Father on his throne." John v. 22—27: "The Father has committed all judgment into the hands of the Son." It is true, the Godhead or divine essence is but one, and it is the same Godhead which belongs to the Father that dwells in the Son, and in this respect "Christ and the Father are one; he is in the Father and the Father in him," John x. 33, 38: yet the Father is constantly exhibited in scripture with peculiar characters of prime authority, and the Son is represented as receiving all from the Father. John v. 19, 20, 22, 26, 27.

If it be farther inquired, why Christ is called the Lamb of God, I shall not pursue those many fine metaphors and similes in which the wit and fancy of men have run a long course on this subject, but shall only mention these two things:

1. He is called the Lamb, from the innocence of his behaviour, the quietness and meekness of his

disposition and conduct in the world. The character of Jesus among men was peaceful and harmless, and patient in injuries; "When he was reviled, he reviled not again, but was led as a lamb to the slaughter" with submission and without revenge: this resemblance appears and is set forth to view in several scriptures, wherein he is compared to this gentle creature, Acts viii. 32; 1 Peter ii. 23.

2. He is called the Lamb, because he was appointed a sacrifice for the sins of men, John i. 29: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." 1 Pet. i. 18, 19: "You were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." It was a lamb that was ordained for the constant daily sacrifice amongst the Jews, morning and evening, to typify the constant and everlasting influence of the atonement made by the death of Christ. Heb. x. 11, 12. It was a lamb which was sacrificed at the passover, and on which the families of Israel feasted to commemorate their redemption from the slavery of Egypt, and to typify Christ who "is our passover who was sacrificed for us," and for whose sake the destroying angel spares all who trust in him. 1 Cor. v. 7.

But will a Lamb discover such dreadful wrath? Has the Lamb of God such indignation in him? Can the meek, the compassionate, the merciful Son of God put on such terrible forms and appearances? Are his tender mercies vanished quite away, and will he renounce the kind aspect and the gentle language of a lamb for ever?

To this I answer, that the various glories and offices of our blessed Lord require a variety of human metaphors and emblems to represent them. He was a Lamb, full of gentleness, meekness and compassion, to invite and encourage sinful perishing creatures to accept of divine mercy: but he has

now to deal with obstinate and rebellious criminals, who renounce his Father's mercy, and resist all the gentle methods of his own grace and salvation; and he is sent by the Father to punish those rebellions: but he is named the Lamb of God still, to put the rebels in mind what gentleness and compassions they have affronted and abused, and to make it appear that their guilt is utterly inexcusable.

Let us remember Christ is now a Lamb raised to the throne in heaven, and furnished and armed with seven eyes and seven horns, with perfect knowledge and perfect power to govern the world, to vindicate his own honour, and to avenge himself upon his impenitent and obstinate enemies. Rev. v. 5, 6. Here the Lamb will assume the name of the Lion of the tribe of Judah also, and he must act in different characters according to the persons he had to deal with. The second general question which we are to consider, is, How comes the wrath of that great day to be so terrible?

I answer in general, Because it is not only the wrath of God, but of the Lamb: it is the wrath that is manifested for the affronts of divine authority and the abuse of divine mercy: it is wrath that is awakened by the contempt of the laws of God written in the books of nature and scripture, and for the contempt of his love revealed in the gospel by Jesus Christ.

It is proper to observe here, that the wrath of God and the wrath of the Lamb are not to be conceived as exactly the same, for it is the wrath of the Son of God in his human nature exalted, as well as the displeasure of God the Father: it is the righteous and holy resentment of the man Jesus awakened and let loose against rebellious creatures, that have broken all the rules of his Father's government, and have refused all the proposals of his Father's

grace: it is the wrath of the highest, the greatest and the best of creatures joined to the wrath of an offended Creator.* But let us enter a little into particulars.

1. It is righteous wrath and just and deserved vengeance that arises from the clearest discoveries of the love of God neglected and the sweetest messages of divine grace refused. All the former discoveries of the love of God to men, both in nature and providence, as well as by divine revelation, whether made by men or by angels, whether in the days of the patriarchs, or in the days of Moses and the Jews, were far inferior to the grace which was revealed by Jesus Christ: and therefore the sin of rejecting it is greater in proportion, and the punishment will be more severe. "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward,—how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, as this which began to be spoken by our Lord?" Heb. ii. 2, 3.

Moses had many true discoveries of grace made to him and intrusted with him for sinful men: but the scripture saith, John i. 17, "The law came by Mo-

* Here let it be observed, that when the holy scripture speaks of the wrath and indignation of the blessed God, we are not to understand it as though God were subject to such passions or affections of nature, as we feel fermenting or working within ourselves when our anger rises: but because the justice or rectoral wisdom of God inclines him to bring natural evil, pain or sorrow upon those who are obstinately guilty of moral evil or sin, and to treat them as anger or wrath inclines men to treat those that have offended them, therefore, the scripture, speaking after the manner of men, calls it the wrath and indignation of God.

And it is hard to say, whether or not the wrath of the Lamb, that is, the man Christ Jesus, in whom Godhead dwells, be any thing more than the calm, dispassionate, rectoral wisdom of the human nature of Christ inclining him to punish rebellious and impenitent sinners, in conformity to the will of God his Father or in concurrence with the Godhead which dwells in him.

ses, and grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," i. e. in such superabundance, as though grace and truth had never appeared in the world before. The forgiving mercy of God, under the veil of ceremonies and sacrifices, and the mediation of Christ under the type of the high priest, was but a dark and imperfect discovery in comparison of the free, the large, the full forgiveness which is brought to us by the gospel of Christ. Learn this doctrine at large from Heb. x. 1—14. This is amazing mercy, astonishing grace, and the despisers of it will deserve to perish with double destruction; for they wink with their eyes against clearer light, and reject the offers of more abounding love.

2. It is wrath that is awakened by the most precious and most expensive methods of salvation slighted and undervalued. Well may God say to Christian nations, especially to Great Britain who sits under the daily sound of this gospel, "What could I have done more for you than I have done?" Isa. v. 4. I have sent my own Son, the Son of my bosom, the Son of my eternal love, to take flesh and blood upon him, that he might be able to die in your stead who were guilty rebels and deserved to die: I have given him up to the insults and injuries of men, to the temptations, the buffetings and rage of devils, to the stroke of the sword of my justice, to the cursed death of the cross for you; here is heaven and salvation purchased for man with the dearest and most valuable life in all the creation, with the richest blood that ever ran in the veins of a creature, with the life and blood of the Son of God, and yet you refused to receive and accept of this salvation procured at so immense a price. I called you to partake of this invaluable blessing freely, without money and without price, and yet you slighted all these offers of mercy; what remains but that my wrath should kindle against you in the hottest degree, and fill your souls with ex-

quisite anguish and misery? You have refused to accept of a covenant which was sealed with the blood of my own Son, which was confirmed by miraculous operations of my own Spirit; you have valued your sinful pleasures and the trifles of this vain world above the blood of my Son and the life of your souls. It is proper that divine vengeance should be your portion, who have rejected such rich treasures of divine love. Heb. x. 28—31: "He that despised Moses's law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will repay, saith the Lord."

6. It is wrath that must avenge the affronts and injuries done to the prime minister of God's government and the chief messenger of his mercy. All the patriarchs and the prophets and angels themselves, were but servants to bring messages of divine grace to men: and some of them in awful forms and appearances represented the authority of God too: but the Son of God is the prime minister of his government, and the noblest ambassador of his grace, and the chief deputy or vicegerent in his Father's kingdom. See Heb. i. 1, 2; Psal. ii. 6, 9, 12. His Father's glory and grandeur, compassion and love, are most sublimely exhibited in the face of Christ his Son, and God will not have his highest and fairest image disgraced and affronted without peculiar and signal vengeance.

The great God will vindicate the honours of his Son Jesus in the infinite destruction of a rebellious and unbelieving world; and the Son himself hath wrath and just resentment: he will vindicate his own authority and his commission of grace. He hath a rod of iron put into his hands as well as a sceptre

of mercy, and with this rod will he break to pieces rebellious nations. Rev. iii. latter end. It is not fit that the first minister of the empire of the King of heaven and the brightest image of his majesty and of his love, should appear always in the character of a Lamb, a meek and unresenting creature. He will put on the Lion, when his commission of grace is ended: he is the "Lion of the tribe of Judah." Rev. v. 5. And will rend the caul of the heart of those unrepenting sinners who have resisted his authority and abused his love.

And how will the wrath of the Lamb of God penetrate the souls of sinners with intense anguish, when the meek and the compassionate Jesus shall be commissioned and constrained to speak the language of resentment and divine indignation?

"Did you not hear of me, sinners, in yonder world, which lies weltering in flames? Did you not read of me in the gospel of my grace? Did you not learn my character and my salvation in the ministrations of my word? Were you not told that I was appointed to be the Saviour of a lost world, and a minister of divine mercy to men? And was there not abundant evidence of it by miracles and prophecies? Were you not told that I was exalted after my sufferings to the right hand of God on purpose to "bestow repentance and remission of sins?" Acts v. 31. And were you not informed also, that I had a rod of iron given me to dash rebels to death? Psal. ii. What is the reason you never came to me, or submitted to my government, or accepted of my grace? Did you never hear of the threatenings that stood like drawn swords against those who wilfully refuse this mercy? Did you think these were mere bugbears, mere sounding words to fright children with, and harmless thunder that would never blast you? Did you think these flashes of wrath in my word were such sort of lightning as

you might safely play with, and flame that would never burn? What punishments, think you, do you deserve, first for the abuse of my authority, and then for the wilful and obstinate refusal of my grace? Is it not divinely fit and proper, my wrath should awake against such heinous criminals? Where is any proper object for my resentment if you are not made objects of it? Take them, angels, bind them hand and foot, and take them into outer darkness: let them be thrown headlong into the prison of hell, where fire and brimstone burn unquenchably, where light and peace and hope can never come. Let them be crushed with the rod of iron which the Father hath put into my hands as the first minister of his kingdom, as the avenger of his despised grace."

4. It is a wrath that is excited by a final and utter rejection of the last proposals of divine love. When mercy was offered to men by the blessed God at first, the discoveries were more dark and imperfect, there were still farther discoveries to be made in following ages: therefore the crime and guilt of sinners in those former days, was much less than the crime and guilt of those who reject this last proposal of mercy. There is no farther edition of the covenant of grace for those who refuse this offer. Those who neglected Christ as he is set forth in the gospel to be a sacrifice for sin, "there remains no more sacrifice for them, but a certain fearful expectation of vengeance and fiery indignation which shall consume the adversary." Heb. x. 26, 28.

All the former dispensations of grace are contained eminently and completed in this dispensation of the gospel. God can send no greater messenger than his own Son, and he concludes and finishes the whole scene and period of grace with the gospel of Christ. There remains nothing but wrath to the uttermost for those who have abused

this last offer of mercy. This was exemplified in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jews a little after they had put Christ to death, and rejected the salvation which he proposed; and this wrath will be more terribly glorified in the final destruction of every sinner that wilfully rejects the glad tidings of this salvation.

5. It is such wrath as arises from the patience of a God tired and worn out by the boldest iniquities of men, and by a final perseverance in their rebellions. It is the character and glory of God to be "long-suffering and slow to anger." Exod. xxxiv. 6: "The Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth;" and Jesus his Son is the minister of this his patience, and the intercessor for this delay of judgment and vengeance. He is represented as interceding one year after another for the reprieve of obstinate sinners, and at his intercession God the Father waits to be gracious: but God will not wait and delay and keep silence for ever, nor will Jesus for ever plead. Psal. l. 1, 3, 21, 22: "Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." God will say then to obstinate sinners, as he did to the Jews of old, Jer. xv. 5, 6, "I will stretch out my hand against thee and destroy thee: I am weary of repenting:" and even the abused patience of Jesus the Saviour shall turn into fury, when the day of recompense shall come, and the "day of vengeance which is in his heart." Isa. lxiii. 1, 4.

O let each of us consider, "How have I made the grace of God wait on me? How many messages of peace and pardon have I neglected? How many years have I delayed to accept of this salvation, and made Jesus wait on an impenitent rebel with the commission of mercy in his hand, while I have refused to receive it? Let my soul be this day awa-

kened to lay hold of the covenant of grace, to submit to the gospel of Christ; lest to-morrow the days of his commission of mercy toward me expire, lest the patience of God be finished, lest the abused love of the Saviour turn into fury, and nothing remain for me but unavoidable destruction."

It is a sentence of divine wrath which shall be attended with the fullest conviction of sinners, and self-condemnation in their own consciences. This doubles the sensations of divine wrath, and enhances the anguish of the criminal to a high degree.

This final unbelief and rejection of grace is a sin against so much light and so much love, that however men cheat their consciences now, and charm them into silence, yet at the last great day their own consciences shall be on the side of the Judge, when he pronounces wrath and damnation upon them. What infinite terrors will shake the soul when there is not one of its own thoughts can speak peace within? When all its own inward powers shall echo to the sentence of the Judge, and acknowledge the justice and equity of it for ever.

Oh who can express the agonies of pain and torture, when the impenitent sinner shall be awakened into such reflections as these? "I was placed in a land of light and knowledge; the light of the gospel of grace shone all round me; but I winked my eyes against the light, and now I am plunged into utter and eternal darkness. I was convinced often that I was a sinner and in danger of death and hell, I was convinced of the truth of the gospel and the all-sufficiency of the salvation of Christ, but I loved the vanities of this life, I followed the appetites of the flesh and the delusive charms of a tempting world; I delayed to answer to the voice of providence and the voice of mercy, the voice of the gospel inviting me to this salvation, and the voice of Christ

requiring me to be saved. My own heart condemns me with ten thousand reproaches: how righteous is God in his indignation! How just is the resentment of the Lamb of God in this day of his wrath! What clear and convincing and dreadful equity attends the sentence of my condemnation, and doubles the anguish of my soul!"

7. It is such wrath as shall be executed immediately and eternally, without one hour of reprieve, and without the least hope of mercy, and that through all the ages to come: for though Jesus is the Mediator between God and man, to reconcile those to God who have broken his law, there is no Mediator appointed to reconcile those sinners to Christ when they have finally resisted the grace of his gospel. There is no blood nor death that can atone for the final rejection of the blood of this dying Saviour. If we resist Jesus Christ the Lord and his atonement and his sacrifice, his gospel and his salvation, there remains no more atonement for us. Let us consider each of these circumstances apart, and dwell a little on these terrors, that our hearts may be affected with them.

(1.) This wrath shall be executed immediately, for the time of reprieve is come to an end. Here divine wisdom and justice have set the limits of divine patience, and they reach no farther.

(2.) It is wrath that shall be executed without mercy, because the day and hour of mercy is for ever finished. That belongs only to this life. The day of grace is gone for ever: he that once made them will now have no mercy upon them, and he that formed them will show them no favour. Isa. xxvii. 11. The very mercy of the Mediator, the compassion of the Lamb of God is turned into wrath and fury. The Lamb himself has put on the form of a lion, and there is no redeemer or advocate to speak a word for

them who have finally rejected Jesus the only Mediator, worn out the age of his pity, and provoked his wrath as well as his Father's.

(3.) It is wrath without end, for their souls are immortal, their bodies are raised to an immortal state, and their whole nature being sinful and miserable and immortal, they must endure a wretched and miserable immortality. This is the representation of the book of God, even of the New Testament, and I have no commission from God either to soften these words of terror, or to shorten the term of their misery.

REMARKS ON THIS DISCOURSE.

Remark 1. What a wretched mistake is it to imagine the great God is nothing else but mercy, and Jesus Christ is nothing else but love and salvation. It is true, God has more mercy than we can imagine: his love is boundless in many of its exercises, and Jesus his Son, who is the image of the Father, is the fairest image of his love and grace. His compassions have heights and depths and lengths and breadths in them that pass all our knowledge. Eph. iii. 18. But God is a universal Sovereign, a wise and righteous Governor: there is majesty with him as well as grace; and Jesus is Lord of lords, and King of kings: he bears the image of his Father's justice as well as of his Father's love; otherwise he could not be the full brightness of his glory, nor the express image of his person.

And besides, the Father hath armed him with powers of divine vengeance as well as with powers of mercy and salvation, Psal. ii. 9. He has put the rod of iron into his hand "to dash the nations like a potter's vessel." Rev. ii. 27, and xix. 13. He is the "elect and precious corner stone laid in Zion." 1 Pet. ii. 6. But he is the stone that "will bruise those

who stumble at him, and those on whom he shall fall he will grind them to powder." Matt. xxi. 42. He is a Lamb and a Lion too: he can suffer at Jerusalem and Mount Calvary with silence, and not open his mouth, and he can roar from heaven with overspreading terror, and shake the world with the sound of his anger. See that his mercy be not abused.

Remark 2. The day of Christ's patience makes haste to an end. Every day of neglected grace hastens on the hour of his wrath and vengeance. Sinners waste their months and years in rebellion against his love, while he waits months and years to be gracious: but Christ is all-wise, and he knows the proper period of long-suffering, and the proper moment to let all his wrath and resentment loose on obstinate and unreclaimable sinners. Oh may every one of our souls awake to faith and repentance, to religion and righteousness, to hope and salvation, before this day of our peace be finished and gone for ever. Psal. ii. 12: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." There was once a season when he saw the nation of the Jews and the people of Jerusalem wasting the proposals of his love; they let their day of mercy pass away unimproved, and he foretold their destruction with tears in his eyes. Luke xix. 41, 42: "He beheld the city, and wept over it;" alas, for the inhabitants, who would not be saved. He was then a messenger of salvation, and clothed with pity to sinners; but in the last great day of his wrath there is no place for these tears of compassion, no room for pity or forgiveness.

Remark 3. When we preach terror to obstinate sinners, we may approach Jesus Christ as well as when we preach love and salvation; for he is the minister of his Father's government both in vengeance and mercy: the Lamb hath wrath as well as

grace, and he is to be feared as well as to be trusted; and he must be represented under all the characters of dignity to which he is exalted, that knowing the terrors of the Lord as well as the compassion of the Saviour, we may persuade sinful men to accept of salvation and happiness.

DISCOURSE VI.

THE VAIN REFUGE OF SINNERS.

OR,

A Meditation on the Rocks near Tunbridge Wells.

1729.

REV. vi. 15, 16, 17.

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, &c., hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains: And said to the rocks and mountains, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

IN the former discourse on this text, we have taken a survey of these two persons and their characters, God and the Lamb, whose united wrath spreads so terrible a scene through the world at the great judgment day; we have also inquired and found sufficient reasons why the anger and justice of God should be so severe against the sinful sons and daughters of men who have wilfully broken his law and refused the grace of his gospel, and why the indignation of the Son of God should be super-added to all the terrors of his Father's vengeance.

We are come now to the third and last general head of discourse, and that is to consider how vain will all the refuges and hopes of sinners be found in that dreadful day, when God and the Lamb shall join to manifest their wrath and indignation against them.

These hopes and shifts and refuges of rebellious and guilty creatures, are represented by a noble image and description in my text: they shall call to the rocks and the mountains to fall upon them and to cover them from the face of Him that sits upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. As this address to mountains and to rocks appears to be but a vain hope in extreme distress, when a feeble and helpless criminal is pursued by a swift and mighty avenger, so vain and fruitless shall all the hopes of sinners be to escape the just indignation and sentence of their Judge. In order to show the vanity of all the refuges and shifts to which sinners shall betake themselves in that day, let us spread abroad this sacred description of them in a paraphrase under the following heads.

1. Let us consider the rocks and mountains as vast and mighty created beings, of huge figure and high appearance, whose aid is sought in the last extremity of distress; and what is this but calling upon creatures to help them against their Creator? What is it but flying to creatures to deliver and save them when their offended God resolves to punish? A vain refuge indeed, when God, the Almighty maker of all things, and Jesus his Son, by whom all things were made, shall agree to arise and go forth against them in their robes of judgment and with their artillery of vengeance? What created being dares interpose in that hour to shelter or defend a condemned criminal? What high and mighty creature is able to afford the least security or protection?

The princes of the earth and the captains, the kings and heroes and conquerors, with all their millions of armed men, are not able to lift a hand for the defence of one sinner against the anger of God and the Lamb. They themselves shall quake and shiver at the tremendous sight, and they shall fly into the holes of the rocks like mere cowards, and shall join their outcries with the poor and the slave, entreating the rocks and mountains to befriend them with shelter and safety.

Not the highest mountains, not the hardest or the strongest rocks, not the most exalted or most powerful persons or things in nature can defend when the God of nature resolves to destroy: when he who is higher than the highest, and stronger than the strongest, shall pronounce destruction upon rebels, what creature can speak deliverance?

The rocks and mountains obey their Maker, they shiver in pieces at the word of his wrath, and will yield no relief to criminals: but man, rebellious man, disobeys his Maker and calls to the rocks and mountains to protect him. Vain hope, O sinner, to make the most exalted creatures your friends, when God the Creator is your enemy. These inanimate things have never learnt disobedience to their Maker, and rather than screen a rebel from his deserved judgments, they will offer themselves as instruments of divine vengeance.

2. Rocks and mountains in their clifts and dens and caverns, are sometimes considered as places of secrecy and concealment. My text tells us, that "kings and mighty men, the rich and the free man, as well as the poor and the slave, hid themselves in dens and in the rocks of the mountains." They hoped there might be some secret corner whose thick shadows and darkness were sufficient to hide them, where the Judge might not spy or find them out.

Vain hope for sinners to hide in the holes of the rocks and the deepest caverns of the mountains, to escape the notice of that God who is all eye and all ear, and present at once in every place of earth and heaven! Foolish expectation indeed, to avoid the notice of the Son of God, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and shoot through the earth and its darkest caves.

Read the 139th Psalm, oh sinner, and then think if it be possible to flee from the eye of God, and to hide thyself in the clefts of the rock where his hand shall not find thee. He has already beset thee behind and before, and his hand already compasses thee round about in all thy paths. Darkness itself cannot cover thee; the night shines as the day before him, and scatters light round about the criminal that would hide himself from the wrath of God. Ask Jeremy the prophet and he shall tell thee, that "none can hide himself in secret places where God shall not see him, the God who fills heaven and earth." Jer. xxiii. 4. He shall hunt obstinate sinners from every mountain and out of the holes of the rocks, for his eyes are upon all their ways, neither their persons nor their iniquities can be hid from him.

And as you can never conceal yourselves from the sight and notice of the Judge, so neither can you turn your eyes away from him: you must behold his face in vengeance, and endure the distressing sight. The rays of his majesty in the day of his wrath shall strike through all the crannies of the darkest den, and pierce the deepest shade. "Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see, and be ashamed," Isa. xxvi. 10. And the face of the Lamb must be seen in all its unknown terrors. Rev. i. 7. "Behold, he comes in the clouds, and every eye shall see him:" the guilty creature and the divine avenger shall meet eye to eye, though the creature has hid himself under rocks and mountains.

3. These rocks and mountains are designed to represent not only concealment and darkness by their holes and caverns, but they are known bulwarks of defence, and places of security and shelter, by reason of their strength and thickness. When the prophet would express the safety of the man who practises righteousness in a vicious age, Isa. xxxiii. 16, he says, "He shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks." These shall be a bulwark round him for his guard and safety. When sinners therefore flee to the mountains and to the rocks, they may be supposed to seek a thick covering or a shield of defence to secure them, where the strokes of divine anger shall not break through and reach them: they trust to the solid protection of the rocks and the strength of the mountains to guard them; but these, alas, can yield no shelter from the stroke of the arm of God. Should the rocks, oh sinner, attempt to befriend thee, and surround thee with their thickest fortification, his wrath would cleave them asunder and pierce thee to the soul with greater ease than thou canst break through a paper wall with the battering engines of war. Ask the prophet Nahum, who was acquainted with the majesty of God, and he shall tell thee, how it "throws down the mountain, and tears the rock in pieces: when his fury is poured out like fire, the mountains quake at him, the hills melt, the earth is burnt at his presence with all that dwell therein. He that has his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet, what mountain can stand before his indignation, and where is the rock that can abide in the fierceness of his anger?" Nah. i. 2—6. Were the whole globe of the earth one massy rock, and should it yawn to the very centre to give thee a refuge and hiding-place, and then close again and surround

thee with its solid defence, yet when the Lord commands, the earth will obey the voice of him that made it: this solid earth would cleave again, and resign the guilty prisoner, and yield thee up to the sword of his justice. Wheresoever a God resolves to strike, safety and defence are impossible things. The sinner must suffer without remedy and without hope, who has provoked an Almighty God, and awakened the wrath of that Saviour who can subdue all things to himself.

4. Rocks and mountains falling upon us are instruments of sudden and overwhelming death. When sinners therefore call to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them and cover them, they are supposed to endeavour to put an end to their own beings by some overwhelming destruction, that they may not live to feel and endure the resentment of an affronted God, and an abused Saviour. Though they are just raised to life, they would fain die again; but God who calls the dead from their graves, will forbid the rocks and the mountains and every creature, to lend sinners their aid to destroy themselves. Sinners in that dreadful day shall seek death, but death shall flee from them. Their natures are now made immortal, and the fall of rocks and mountains cannot crush them to death. They must live to sustain the weight of divine wrath, which is heavier than rocks and mountains.

The life which God hath now given to men in this mortal state may be given up again, or thrown away by the daring impiety of self-murder; and they may make many creatures instruments of their own destruction; but the life which the Son of God shall give them, when he calls them from the dead, is everlasting; they cannot resign their existence and immortality, they cannot part with it, nor can any creature take it from them. They would rather

die than see God in his majesty or the Lamb arrayed in his robes of judgment; but the wretches are immortalized to punishment by the long abused majesty and power of God; and they must live for ever, to learn what it is to despise the authority of a God and to abuse the grace of a Saviour. Their doom is "everlasting burnings: they have no rest day nor night, the smoke of their torment will ascend for ever and ever in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

Thus have we considered those huge and bulky beings, the rocks and the mountains, in all their vast and mighty figures and appearances, with all their clefts and dens and caverns for shelter and concealment, with all their fortification and massy thickness for defence, and with all their power to crush and destroy mankind, and yet we find them utterly insufficient to hide, cover, or protect guilty creatures in that great day of the wrath of God and the Lamb.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FOREGOING DISCOURSE.

1. How strangely do all the appearances of Christ to sinners in the several seasons and dispensations of his grace, differ from that last great and solemn appearance which to them will be a dispensation of final vengeance. He visited the world in divine visions of old, even from the day of the sin of Adam, and it was to reveal mercy to sinful man; and he sometimes assumed the majesty of God to let the world know he was not to be trifled with. He visited the earth at his incarnation: how lowly was his state! How full of grace his ministry! Yet he then gave notice of this day of vengeance, when he should appear in his own and his Father's most awful glories.

He visits the nations now with the word of salvation, he appears in the glass of his gospel, and in the ordinances of his sanctuary, as a Saviour whose heart

melts with love, and in the language of his tenderest compassions and of his dying groans, he invites sinners to be reconciled to an offended God: he appears as a Lamb made a sacrifice for sin, and as a minister of his Father's mercy, offering and distributing pardons to criminals. But when he visits the world as a final Judge, how solemn and illustrious will that appearance be! How terrible his countenance to all those who have refused to receive him as a Saviour! Behold he cometh in flaming fire with ten thousand of his angels, to render vengeance to them that resisted his grace and disobeyed the invitation of his gospel. 2 Thess. i. 7.

Time was when the Father sent forth "his Son, not to condemn the world, but that through him the world might be saved." John iii. 17. But the time is coming, when God shall send him arrayed with majesty and with righteous indignation, to condemn the rebellious world, and inflict upon them the pains of eternal death. Hast thou seen him, oh my soul, in the discoveries of his mercy? fly to him with all the wings of faith and love: with all the speed of desire and joy fly to him, receive his grace, and accept of his salvation; that when the day of the wrath of the Lamb shall appear, thou mayest behold his countenance without terror and confusion.

Reflection 2. How very different will the thoughts of sinners be in that day from what they are at present! How different their wishes and their inclinations! And that with regard to this one terror which my text describes (viz.) that they shall address themselves to the rocks and mountains for shelter, and fly into the dens and caverns of the earth for concealment and safety. Let us survey this in a few particulars.

Sinners, whose looks were once lofty and disdainful, whose eyes were exalted in pride, their mouth set against the heavens and their hearts haughty and full of scorn, they shall be humbled to the dust of the

earth, they shall creep into the hiding-places of the moles and the bats, and thrust their heads into holes and caverns, and dens of desolation, at the appearance of God their Creator in flaming fire, and the Son of God their Judge; for he is the avenger of his own and his Father's injured honour.

Sinners, who were once fond of their idols and their sensual delights, who made idols to themselves of every agreeable creature, and gave it that place in their hearts which belongs only to God, they shall be horribly confounded in that day, when God shall appear in his majesty to shake the earth to the centre and to burn the surface of it with all its bravery. This is nobly described by the prophet Isaiah, chap. the 2d from 10—21: "In that day shall a man cast his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made, each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats, to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the rugged rocks, for fear of the Lord and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth." Sinners, who could not tell how to spend a day without gay company, those sons and daughters of mirth, who turned their midnights into noon with the splendour of their lamps, and the rich and shining furniture of their palaces, whose noisy companions of riot, who made the streets of the city resound with their midnight revels, they shall now fly to the solitary caverns of the rocks, and would be glad to dwell there in darkness and silence for ever, if they might but avoid the wrath of a provoked God, and the countenance of an abused Saviour. They would fain be shut up for ever from day-light, lest they should see the face of an Almighty enemy, whose name and honour have been reproached in their songs of lewd jollity and profaneness.

Sinners who once were fond of liberty in the wildest sense, and could not bear that any restraints

should be laid upon their persons or their wishes, who never could endure the thought of a confinement to their closets for one half hour, to converse with God or with their own souls there, they now call aloud to the rocks and the mountains to immure them round as a refuge from the eye of their Judge. They were once perpetually roving abroad, and gadding through all the gay scenes of sensuality, in quest of new and flowery pleasures, but now they beg to be imprisoned for ever in the dens and caves of the earth: the deepest and most dismal caves are their most ardent wishes, that they might never see the countenance of their divine avenger, nor feel the weight of his hand.

Sinners, who heretofore thought themselves and their deeds of darkness secure enough from the eye of God, and from the strokes of his justice, while they revelled in their common habitations, those who even under the open sky could defy the Almighty, could laugh at his threatenings, and mock the prophecies of his vengeance, now they can find no caverns deep or dark enough to hide them from his sight; his lightnings penetrate the hardest rocks, and shine into the deepest solitudes: there is no screen or shelter thick and strong enough to stand between God and them, and to cover and shield them from his thunder. They call now to the mountains and rocks to be an eternal screen; but the rocks and mountains are deaf to their cry; then shall they remember with unknown regret and anguish, those days of grace when Christ Jesus, who is now their Judge, offered himself to become a screen to them, and a defence from the anger of God their Creator: but they rejected his offered grace. He would have been the Rock of their safety, where they should have found refuge from the fiery threatenings of the broken law, and the majesty of an offended God: the Father himself had appointed him for this kind

office to repenting sinners; and perhaps he gave Moses a type or emblem of it when he commanded himself to hide in the clefts of the rock to secure him from destruction while the burning blaze of his glory passed by, Exod. xxxiii. 22. And Isaiah the prophet had foretold, that this Jesus should be as a shadow of a great rock to shelter them from the beams of the wrath of God; but they refused this blessing, they renounced this refuge; and now they find there is no other rock sufficient to become a shelter from the stroke of his Almighty arm, or a sufficient shadow from the burning vengeance.

Sinners, who once overrated their flesh and blood, and loved it with infinite fondness, who treated their fleshly appetites with excessive nicety and elegance, and affected a humorous delicacy in every thing round about them, would now gladly creep into the mouldy caverns of the rocks, they would be glad to hide and defile themselves in the dark and noisome grottoes of the earth, and squeeze their bodies into the rough and narrow clefts, to shield themselves from the indignation of him that sits upon the throne and of the Lamb.

Those who once were so tender of this mortal life and limbs, and could not think of bearing the least hardship for the sake of virtue and piety, are now wishing to have those delicate limbs of theirs crushed by the fall of rocks and mountains: they wish earnestly to have their lives and their souls destroyed for ever, and their whole natures buried in desolation and death, if they might but avoid the eternal agonies and torments that are prepared for them. Now they long for caverns and graves to hide them for ever from the justice of God, whose authority they have despised, and from the wrath of a Saviour whose mercy they have impiously renounced.

Look forward, oh my soul, to this awful and dreadful hour; survey this tremendous scene of confusion,

when sinners shall run counter to all their former principles and wishes, and pass a quite different judgment upon their sinful delights from what they were wont to do in the days of this life of vanity. Learn, oh my soul, to judge of things more agreeably to the appearances of that day: never canst thou set the flattering pleasures of sense, and the joys of sin in a truer and juster view than in the light of this glorious and tremendous judgment.

Reflection 3. How great and dreadful must the distress of creatures be when they cannot bear to see the face of God their Creator! How terrible must be the circumstances of the sons of men, when they cannot endure to see the face of the Son of God, but would fain hide themselves from the sight under rocks and mountains! How wretched must their state be who avoid the face of the blessed God with horror; which the holy angels ever behold with the most intense delight, and which the saints rejoice in as their highest happiness! It is their heaven to see God and behold the glory of his Son Jesus. Matt. v. 8. John xvii. But this is the very hell of sinners in that dismal hour, and will fill their souls with such inexpressible anguish, that they call to the rocks and mountains to hide them from the sight. Dreadful and deplorable is their case indeed, who cannot endure to see the countenance of Jesus the Son of God, Jesus the Saviour of men, the copy of the Father's glory, and the image of his beauty and love. They cannot bear to see that Jesus who is the chiefest of ten thousands, and altogether lovely; they fly from that blessed countenance which is the ornament and the joy of all the holy and happy creation; that blessed countenance is become the terror and confusion of impenitent and guilty rebels.

And what shall I do, if I should be found amongst this criminal number in that great day? If I look at

the wisdom and the righteousness of God, these will reflect the keenest rays of horror and anguish upon my soul; for it is that wisdom and that righteousness that have joined to prepare the salvation which I have rejected, and therefore now that wise and righteous God seeth it proper and necessary to punish me with everlasting sorrows. If I look at the power of God, it is a dreadful sight: eternal and almighty power, that can break through rocks and mountains to inflict vengeance upon the guilty, and stands engaged by his honour to break my rebellious spirit with unknown torments. If I look at his goodness or his love, it is love and goodness that I have despised and abused, and it is now changed into divine fury. If I look at the face of Jesus, and find there the correspondent features of his Father, I shall then hate to see it—for this very reason, because it bears his Father's image who is terrible to my thoughts. I shall neither be able to bear the sight of God or of his fairest copy, that is, Jesus his Son, because I am so shamefully unlike them both, and besides, I have affronted their majesty and despised their mercy.

How painful and smarting will be the reflection of my heart in that day, when I shall remember that Jesus called out to me from heaven by the messengers of his grace, and said, "Behold me, behold me, look unto me from the ends of the earth, and be saved:" but now he is armed with a commission of vengeance, and he strikes terror and exquisite pain into my soul with every frown, so that I shall wish to be for ever hid from the face of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to endure this wrath, to stand before his thunder, or bear the lightning of this day? Alas, how miserable must I be by an everlasting necessity, if I cannot bear the countenance of God and Christ, which is the spring of unchangeable happiness to all the saints and the blessed angels? Oh may I time-

ly secure the love of my God, and gain an interest in the favour and salvation of the blessed Jesus! Here, O Lord, at thy feet I lay down all the weapons of my former rebellions; I implore thy love through the interest of thy Son the great Mediator: let me see the light of thy countenance and the smiles of thy face: let me see a reconciled God, and let him tell me that my sins are all forgiven; then shall I not be afraid to meet the countenance of him that sits upon the throne or the Lamb, when Christ shall return from heaven to punish the impenitent rebels against divine grace.

Reflection 4. How hopeless as well as distressed is the case of sinners in that day, when they are driven to this last extremity, to seek help from the rocks and the mountains? It is the last, but the fruitless refuge of a frighted and perishing creature: the rocks and mountains refuse to help them; they will not crush to death those wretches whom the justice of God has doomed to a painful immortality, nor will they conceal or shelter those obstinate rebels whom the Son of God has raised out of their graves to be exposed to public shame and punishment. Those high and hollow rocks, those dismal dens and caverns dark as midnight, those deep and gloomy retreats of melancholy and sorrow, which they shunned with utmost aversion, and could hardly bear to think of them without horror here on earth, are now become their only retreat and shelter; but it is a very vain and hopeless one.

When I see such awful appearances in nature, huge and lofty rocks hanging over my head, and at every step of my approach they seem to nod upon me with overwhelming ruin, when my curiosity searches far into their hollow clefts, their dark and deep caverns of solitude and desolation, methinks while I stand amongst them I can hardly think myself in safety, and at best they give a sort of solemn

and dreadful delight: let me improve the scene to religious purposes, and raise a divine meditation. Am I one of those wretches who shall call to these huge impending rocks to fall upon me? Am I that guilty and miserable creature who shall entreat these mountains to cover me from him that sits on the throne and the Lamb? Am I prepared to meet the countenance of the blessed Jesus, the Judge in that day? Have I such an acquaintance with the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, such a holy faith in his mediation, such a sincere love to him, and such an unfeigned repentance of all my sins, that I can look upon him as my friend and my refuge, and a friend infinitely better than rocks and mountains; for he not only screens me from the divine anger, but introduces me into the Father's love, and places me in his blissful presence for ever.

Reflection 5. What hideous and everlasting mischief is contained in the nature of sin, especially sin against the gospel of Christ, against the methods of grace and the offers of salvation, which exposes creatures to such extreme distress! The fairest and most flattering iniquity, what beautiful colours soever it may put on in the hour of temptation, yet it carries all this hidden mischief and terror in the bosom of it, for it frights the creature from the sight of his Creator, and his Saviour, and makes him fly to every vain refuge. Adam and Eve, the parents of our race, when they lost their innocence and became criminals, fled from the presence of God whom they conversed with before in holy friendship, Gen. iii. 8: "They hid themselves among the trees of Paradise," and the thickest shadows of the garden; but the eye and the voice of God reached them there: the curse found them out, though that was a curse allayed with the promised blessing of a Saviour.

Guilt will work in the conscience, and tell us, that God is angry, and the next thought is, where shall I hide myself from an angry God? but when the mercy of God has taught us where we may hide ourselves, even under the shadow of the cross of his Son, and we refuse to make him our refuge, there remains nothing but a final horror of soul, and a hopeless address to rocks and mountains to hide us from an offended God and a provoked Saviour.

Whensoever, oh my soul, thou shalt find or feel some flattering iniquity alluring thy senses, making court to thy heart, and ready to gain upon thy inward wishes, remember the distress and terror of heart that sinners must undergo in the great and terrible day of the Lord. Think of the rocks and mountains which they vainly call upon to befriend them, to shield them from the vengeance of that Almighty arm which is provoked by sin to make his creatures miserable. Remember, O my soul, and fear; remember and resist the vile temptation, and stand afar off from that practice which will make thee afraid to see the face of God.

Reflection 6. Of what infinite importance is it then to sinners to gain an humble acquaintance and friendship with the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, that we may be able with comfort to behold the face of him that sits on the throne in that day. Which of us can say, I am not a sinner; I am not guilty before God? and which of us then has the courage and hardness to declare, I have no need of a Saviour? And is there any one amongst us who hath not yet fled for refuge to Jesus our only and sufficient hope? There is a protection provided against a provoked God, but there is none against a neglected and abused Saviour: I mean, where this neglect and abuse is final and unrepented. Oh, how solicitous should every soul be in a matter of this divine moment, this everlasting importance! What

words of compassion shall we use, what words of awakening terror, to put sinners in mind of their extreme danger, if they neglect the only security which the gospel has appointed? What language of fear and importunity shall we make use of, to hasten you, oh sinners, to the acquaintance, the faith and the love of Jesus the Saviour, that you may behold his face and the face of the Father with serenity and joy in the last day? Give yourselves up to him then without further delay, as your teacher, your high priest, your reconciler, your Lord and King. His blessed offices are the only chambers of protection when God shall arise to burn the world and to avenge himself on his enemies that will not be reconciled.

Reflection 7. Let us take occasion from my text also to meditate on the happy circumstances of true Christians in that day of terror: behold the Judge appears, he cometh in the clouds surrounded with armies of avenging angels, the ministers of his indignation; he rideth on a chariot of flaming fire: the earth with all its mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord, the fields and the forest become one spacious blaze, the sea grows dry and forsakes its shores, and rivers flee away at his lightning; the rocks are broken and shivered at the appearance of his majesty, the tombs are thrown open, and with terrible dismay shall the graves give up their dead; the pyramids of brick and stone moulder and sink into dust, the sepulchres of brass and marble yield up their royal prisoners, and all the captives of death awake and start into life at the voice of the Son of God. Amidst all these scenes of surprise and horror, with how serene a countenance and how peaceful a soul do the saints awake from their bodies of earth! Calm and serene among all these confusions, they arise from their long slumber, and go to meet their returning Saviour and their friend. They have seen him in the glass of his gospel, submitted to his laws,

and rejoiced in his grace, and they now delight to see him face to face in his glory. They have seen him vested with his commission of mercy, they have heard and received his message of goodness and love, and they cannot but rejoice to see him coming to fulfil his last promises. They have cheerfully subjected themselves to his government here on earth, they have followed him in paths of holiness through the wilderness of this world, and what remains but that they be publicly acknowledged by Jesus the Judge of all, and follow him up to the place of blessedness which he hath prepared for them.

Perhaps some of these holy ones, in the days of the flesh, were banished from the cities and the societies of men for the sake of Christ; they were driven out from their native towns, and forced to seek a shelter in solitary dens and caves, among rocks and mountains, "to wander through deserts in sheepskins and goat-skins, destitute, afflicted, tormented." Heb. xi. 31. They made the clefts of the rocks and caverns of the earth their refuge from the face of their cruel persecutors; the mountains and rocks sheltered them from the wrath of princes, and the dark grottos of the earth, and the dens of wild beasts concealed them from the rage of men, from the sword of the mighty; but now the scene is gloriously changed, the martyrs and holy confessors awaking from their graves, exult and triumph in the smiles of their Judge, and receive public honours before the whole creation of God. They behold the infinite consternation of haughty tyrants, and persecuting princes, of proud generals and bloody captains in that day: they hear them "call to the rocks and mountains to hide them from the face of him that sits upon the throne and the Lamb." The authority and regal honour of the emperors of the earth hath long slept in the dust, but it is lost there for ever; their glory shall not awake nor arise with them: behold the

mighty sinners who have been the enemies of Christ, or negligent of his salvation, how they creep affrighted out of their shattered marbles, and leave all that pomp and pride of death in ruins, to appear before God with shame and everlasting contempt. The men of arms, the captains and sons of valour, whose swords lay under their heads with their trophies and titles spread around them, shall raise their heads up from the dust with utmost affright and anguish of spirit: their courage fails them before the face of Jesus the Lord and Judge of the whole creation. They would fly to the common refuge of slaves, they shrink into the holes of the rocks, and call to the mountains to screen and protect them: and every bond-man, and every free-man who have not known nor loved God and Christ, are plunged into extremest distress; but the humble Christian is serene and joyful, and lifts up his head with courage and delight in the midst of these scenes of astonishment and dismay.

He is come, he is come, saith the saint, even that Lord Jesus whom I have seen, whom I have known and loved in the days of my mortal life, whom I have long waited for in the dust of death; he is come to reward all my labours, to wipe away all my sorrows, to finish my faith and turn it into sight, to fulfil all my hopes and his own promises; he is come to deliver me for ever from all my enemies, and to bear me to the place which he has prepared for those that love him and long for his appearance.

O blessed be the God of grace, who hath convinced me of the sins of my nature, and the sins of my life in the days of my flesh; who hath discovered to me the danger of a guilty and sinful state, hath shown me the commission of mercy in the hands of his Son, hath pointed me to the Lamb of God who was offered as a sacrifice to take away the sins of men, and hath inclined me to receive him in all his

divine characters and offices, and to follow the Captain of my salvation through all the labours and dangers of life. I have trusted him, I have loved him, I have endeavoured, though under many frailties, to honour and obey him, and I can now behold his face without terror; while the mighty men of the earth tremble with amazement and call to the rocks and mountains to hide them from his face, I rejoice to see him in his robes of judgment, for he is come to pronounce me righteous in the face of men and angels, to declare me a good and faithful servant before the whole creation, to set the crown of victory on my head, to take me to heaven with him, that "where he is, I may be also, to behold his glory," and to partake for ever of the blessings of his love. Amen.

DISCOURSE VII.

NO NIGHT IN HEAVEN.

Rev. xxii. 25.

And there shall be no night there.

Length of night and overspreading darkness in the winter season, carries so many inconveniences with it, that it is generally esteemed a most uncomfortable part of our time. Though night and day necessarily succeed each other all the year, by the wise appointment of God in the course of nature, by means of the revolution of the heavenly bodies, or rather of this earthly globe, yet the night season is neither so delightful nor so useful a part of life as the duration of day-light. It is the voice of all nature as well as the word of Solomon, Light is sweet, and a pleasant thing to enjoy the sun-beams. Light gives a glory and beauty to every thing that is visible, and shows the face of nature in its most agreeable colours; but night, as it covers all the visible world with one dark and undistinguishing veil, is less pleasing to all the animal parts of the creation. Therefore, as hell and the place of pu-

nishment is called utter darkness in scripture, so heaven is represented as a mansion of glory, as the inheritance of the saints in light; and this light is constant without interruption, and everlasting, or without end. So my text expresses it: "there shall be no night there."

Let it be observed, that in the language of the holy writers, light is often ascribed to intellectual beings, and is used as a metaphor to imply knowledge and holiness, and joy. Knowledge as the beauty and excellency of the mind, holiness as the best regulation of the will, and joy as the harmony of our best affections in the possession of what we love; and in opposition to these, ignorance, iniquity and sorrow, are represented by the metaphor of darkness. Then we are in darkness in a spiritual sense, when the understanding is beclouded or led into mistake, or when the will is perverted or turned away from God and holiness, or when the most uncomfortable affections prevail in the soul. I might cite particular texts of scripture to exemplify all this. And when it is said, there shall be no night in heaven, it may be very well applied in the spiritual sense; there shall be no errors or mistakes amongst the blessed, no such ignorance as to lead them astray, or to make them uneasy: the will shall never be turned aside from its pursuit of holiness and obedience to God; nor shall the affections ever be ruffled with any thing that may administer grief and pain. Clear and unerring knowledge, unspotted holiness, and everlasting joy, shall be the portion of all the inhabitants of the upper world. These are common mere subjects of discourse.

But I choose rather at present to consider this word NIGHT in its literal sense, and shall endeavour to represent part of the blessedness of the heavenly state under the special description of it. "There is no night there."

Now, in order to pursue this design, let us take a brief survey of the several evils or inconveniences which attend the night or the season of darkness here on earth, and show how far the heavenly world is removed and free from all manner of inconvenience of this kind.

1. Though night be the season of sleep for the relief of nature, and for our refreshment after the labours of the day, yet it is a certain sign of the weakness and weariness of nature, when it wants such refreshments, and such dark seasons of relief. But there is no night in heaven. Say, O ye inhabitants of that vital world, are ye ever weary? Do your natures know any such weakness? Or are your holy labours of such a kind as to expose you to fatigue, or to tire your spirits? The blessed above mount up towards God, as on eagles' wings, they run at the command of God and are not weary, they walk on the hills of Paradise and never faint, as the prophet Isaiah expresses, a vigorous and pleasurable state. Chap. xl. 31.

There are no such animal bodies in heaven, whose natural springs of action can be exhausted or weakened by the business of the day: there is no flesh and blood there to complain of weariness, and to want rest. O blessed state, where our faculties shall be so happily suited to our work, that we shall never feel ourselves weary of it, nor fatigued by it.

And as there is no weariness, so there is no sleeping there. Sleep was not made for the heavenly state. Can the spirits of the just ever sleep under the full blaze of divine glory, under the incessant communications of divine love, under the perpetual influences of the grace of God the Father, and of Jesus the Saviour, and amidst the inviting confluence of every spring of blessedness?

2. Another inconvenience of night near akin to the former is, that business is interrupted by it, partly for want of light to perform it, as well as for

want of strength and spirits to pursue it. This is constantly visible in the successions of labour and repose here on earth; and the darkness of the night is appointed to interrupt the course of labour and the business of the day, that nature may be recruited. But the business of heaven is never interrupted; there is everlasting light and everlasting strength. Say, ye blessed spirits on high, who join in the services which are performed for God and the Lamb there, ye who unite all your powers in the worship and homage that is paid to the Father and to the Son, ye that mingle in all the joyful conversation of that divine and holy assembly, say, is there found any useless hour there? Do your devotions, your duties and your joys ever suffer such an entire interruption of rest and silence, as the season of darkness on earth necessarily creates amongst the inhabitants of our world?

The living creatures* which are represented by John the apostle in Rev. iv., whether they signify saints or angels, yet they were full of eyes that never slumber; they rest not day nor night: this is spoken in the language of mortals, to signify, that they are never interrupted by any change of seasons or intervening darkness in the honours they pay to God: they are described as ever saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." And the same sort of expression is used concerning the saints in heaven. Rev. vii. 15: "They who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple," that is, they constantly serve and worship him in his holy temple in heaven. Perhaps the different orders and ranks of

* The word *Zoa*, which is translated beasts, signifies only animals or living creatures, and does not carry with it so mean and so disagreeable an idea as the word beasts in English.

them in a continual succession, are ever doing some honours to God. As there is no night there, so there is no cessation of their services, their worship and their holy exercises, in one form or another, throughout the duration of their being.

Our pleasures here on earth are short-lived: if they are intense, nature cannot bear them long, any more than constant business and labour: and if our labours and our pleasures should happily join and mingle here on earth, which is not always the case, yet night compels us to break off the pleasing labour, and we must rest from the most delightful business. Happy is that region on high, where business and pleasure are for ever the same among all the inhabitants of it, and there is no pause or entire cessation of the one or the other. Tell me, ye warm and lively Christians, when your hearts are sweetly and joyfully engaged in the worship of God, in holy conversation, or in any pious services here on earth, how often you have been forced to break off these celestial entertainments by the returning night? But in the heavenly state there is everlasting active service with everlasting delight and satisfaction.

In that blessed world there can be no idleness, no inactivity, no trifling intervals to pass away time, no vacant or empty spaces in eternal life. Who can be idle under the immediate eye of God? Who can trifle in the presence of Christ? Who can neglect the pleasurable work of heaven under the sweet influences of the present Deity, and under the smiles of his countenance, who approves all their work and worship?

3. As in our present world the hours of night are unactive if we sleep, so they seem long and tedious when our eyes are wakeful and sleep flies from us. Perhaps we hear the clock strike one hour after another, with wearisome longings for the next

succeeding hour: we wish the dark season at an end, and we long for the approach of morning; we grow impatient for the dawning of the day. But in heaven, ye spirits who have dwelt longest there, can ye remember one tiresome or tedious hour, through all the years of your residence in that country? Is there not eternal wakefulness among all the blessed? Can any of you ever indulge a slumber? Can you sleep in heaven? Can you want it, or wish for it? No, for that world is all vital and sprightly for ever. When we leave this flesh and blood, farewell to all the tedious measures of time, farewell tiresome darkness; our whole remaining duration is life and light, vital activity, and vigour, attended with everlasting holiness and joy.

4. While we are here on earth the darkness of the night often exposes us to the danger of losing our way, of wandering into confusion, or falling into mischief. When the sunbeams have withdrawn their light, and midnight clouds overspread the heaven, we cannot see our path before us, we cannot pursue our proper course nor secure ourselves from stumbling. How many travellers have been betrayed by the thick shadows of the night into mistaken ways or pathless deserts, into endless mazes among thorns and briers, into bogs and pits and precipices, into sudden destruction and death? But there are no dangers of this kind in the heavenly world; all the regions of Paradise are for ever illuminated by the glory of God: the light of his countenance shines upon every step that we shall take, and brightens all our way. We shall walk in the light of God, and under the blessed beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and we are secured for ever against wandering; and against every danger of tripping or falling in our course. Our feet may stumble on the dark mountains here

below, but there is no stumbling-block on the hills of Paradise, nor can we go astray from our God, or from our duty. The paths of that country are all pleasure, and ever-living day-light shines upon them without end. Happy beings who dwell or travel there!

5. In the night we are exposed here on earth to the violence and plunder of wicked men, whether we are abroad or at home. There is scarcely any safety now-a-days to those who travel in the night, and even in our own habitations there is frequent fear and surprise. At that season the sons of mischief dig through houses in the dark which they had marked for themselves in the day-time: they lurk in corners to seize the innocent and to rob him of his possessions. But in the heavenly world there is no dark hour; there is nothing that can encourage such mischievous designs; nor are any of the sons of violence or the malicious powers of darkness suffered to have an abode or refuge in that country. No surprise nor fear belongs to the inhabitants of those regions. Happy souls, who spend all their life in the light of the countenance of God, and are for ever secure from the plots and mischievous devices of the wicked!

While we dwell here below amongst the changing seasons of light and darkness, what daily care is taken to shut the doors of our dwellings against the men of mischief? What solicitude in a time of war to keep the gates of our towns and cities well secured against all invasion of enemies? Every man with his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night. But in that blessed world there is no need of such defences; no such guardian cares to secure the inhabitants. "The gates of that city shall not be shut by day, and there is no night there." There shines perpetual day-light, and the gates are ever open to receive new-comers from our world, or for the con-

veyance of orders and messages to and fro from the throne, through all the dominions of God and of the Lamb. Blessed are the inhabitants of that country, where there are no dangers arising from any of the wicked powers of darkness, nor any dark minute to favour their plots of mischief.

6. The time of night and darkness is the time of the concealment of secret sins. Shameful iniquities are then practised amongst men, because the darkness is a cover to them: "The eye of the adulterer watches for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me," Job. xxiv. 15. In the black and dark night he hopes for concealment as well as the thief and the murderer, "and they that are drunken, are drunken in the night." 1 Thess. v. 7. The hours of darkness are a temptation to these iniquities, and the shadows of the evening are a veil to cover them from the sight of men. They find a screen behind the curtains of the night, and a refuge in thick darkness. But in the heavenly world there is no temptation to such iniquities, no defilement can gain an entrance there, nor could it find any veil or covering. The regions of light and peace and holy love are never violated with such scenes of villany and guilt. No secret sins can be committed there, nor can they hope for any screen to defend them from the eye of God and the Lamb, whose eyes are like a flame of fire. The light of God shines round every creature in that country, and there is not a saint or angel there that desires a covering from the sight of God, nor would accept of a veil or screen to interpose between him and the lovely glories of divine holiness and grace. To behold God and to live under the blessings of his eye is their everlasting and chosen joy. O that our world were more like it!

7. When the night returns upon us here on earth, the pleasures of sight vanish and are lost. Knowledge

is shut out at one entrance in a great degree, and one of our senses is withheld from the spreading beauties and glories of this lower creation, almost as though we were deprived of it, and were grown blind for a season.

It is true, the God of nature has appointed the moon and stars to relieve the darkness at some seasons, that when the sun is withdrawn, half the world at those hours may not be in confusion: and by the inventions of men we are furnished with lamps and candles to relieve our darkness within doors: but if we stir abroad in the dark night, instead of the various and delightful scenes of the creation of God in the skies and the fields, we are presented with a universal blank of nature, and one of the great entertainments and satisfactions of this life is quite taken away from us. But in heaven the glories of that world are for ever in view: the beauteous scenes and prospects of the hills of paradise are never hidden: we shall there continually behold a rich variety of things which eye hath not seen on earth, which ear hath not heard, and which the heart of man hath not conceived. Say, ye souls in paradise, ye inhabitants of that glorious world, is there any loss of pleasure by your absence from those works of God which are visible here on earth, while you are for ever entertained with those brighter works of God in the upper world? While every corner of that country is enlightened by the glory of God himself, and while the Son of God, with all his beams of grace shines for ever upon it.

8. It is another unpleasing circumstance of the night season, that it is the coldest part of time. When the sun is sunk below the earth, and its beams are hidden from us, its kindly and vital heat, as well as its light, are removed from one side of the globe; and this gives a sensible uneasiness in

the hours of midnight to those who are not well provided with warm accommodations.

And I might add also, it is too often night with us in a spiritual sense, while we dwell here on earth; our hearts are cold as well as dark: how seldom do we feel that fervency of spirit in religious duties which God requires? How cool is our love to the greatest and the best of beings? How languid and indifferent are our affections to the Son of God, the chiefest of ten thousand and altogether lovely? And how much doth the devotion of our souls want its proper order and vivacity?

But when the soul is arrived at heaven, we shall be all warm and fervent in our divine and delightful work. As there shall be nothing painful to the senses in that blessed climate, so there shall not be one cold heart there, nor so much as one lukewarm worshipper; for we shall live under the immediate rays of God who formed the light, and under the kindest influences of Jesus the Sun of Righteousness. We shall be made like his angels who are most active spirits, and his "ministers, who are flames of fire." Psal. civ. 4. Nor shall any dulness or indifference hang upon our sanctified powers and passions: they shall be all warm and vigorous in their exercise amidst the holy enjoyments of that country.

In the ninth and last place, as night is the season appointed for sleep, so it becomes a constant periodical emblem of death, as it returns every evening. Sleep and midnight, as I have shown before, are no seasons of labour or activity, nor of delight in the visible things of this world: it is a dark and stupid scene wherein we behold nothing with truth, though we are sometimes deceived and deluded by dreaming visions and vanities: night and the slumbers of it are a sort of shorter death and burial, interposed between the

several daily scenes and transactions of human life. But in heaven, as there is no sleeping, there is no dying, nor is there any thing there that looks like death. Sleep, the image or emblem of death, is for ever banished from that world. All is vital activity there: every power is immortal, and every thing that dwells there is for ever alive. There can be no death, nor the image of it, where the ever-living God dwells and shines with his kindest beams; his presence maintains perpetual vitality in every soul, and keeps the new creature in its youth and vigour for ever. The saints shall never have reason to mourn over their withering graces, languid virtues, or dying comforts; nor shall they complain of drowsy faculties, or unactive powers, where God and the Lamb are for ever present in the midst of them. Shall I invite your thoughts to dwell a little upon this subject?

Shall we make a more particular inquiry, whence it comes to pass that there is no night, nor darkness in the heavenly city? We are told a little before the words of my text, that "the glory of God enlightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. There is no need of the sun by day, or the moon by night;" there is no need of any such change of seasons as day and night in the upper regions, nor any such alternate enlighteners of a dark world as God has placed in our firmament or in this visible sky. The inheritance of the saints in light is sufficiently irradiated by God himself, who at his first call made the light spring up out of darkness over a wide chaos of confusion before the sun and moon appeared; and the beams of divine light, grace and glory are communicated from God the original fountain of it, by the Lamb, to all the inhabitants of the heavenly country. It was by Jesus his Son that God made the light at first, and by him he conveys it to all the happy worlds.

There is no doubt of this in the present heaven of saints departed from flesh, who are ascended "to the spirits of the just made perfect." It is one of their privileges that they go to dwell, not only where they see the face of God, but where they behold the glory of Christ and converse with "Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and are for ever present with the Lord who redeemed them." Heb. xii. 23, 24; 2 Cor. v. 8. Since his mediatorial kingdom and offices are not yet finished in the present heaven of separate souls, we may depend on this blessedness to be communicated through Christ the Lamb of God, and all the spiritual enjoyments and felicities which are represented under the metaphor of light, are conveyed to them through Jesus the Mediator.

The sun in the natural world is a bright emblem of divinity or the Godhead, for it is the spring of all light and heat and life to the creation. It is by the influences of the sun that herbs, plants, and animals, are produced in their proper seasons, and in all their various beauties, and they are all refreshed and supported by it. Now if we should suppose this vast globe of fire which we call the sun, to be enclosed in a huge hollow sphere of crystal, which should attempt its rays like a transparent veil, and give milder and gentler influences to the burning beams of it, and yet transmit every desirable and useful portion of light or heat, this would be a happy emblem of the man "Christ Jesus, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." It is the Lamb of God who in a mild and gracious manner conveys the blessings originally derived from God his Father to all the saints. We partake of them in our measure in this lower world among his churches here on earth; but it is with a nobler influence and in a more sublime degree the blessings of Paradise are diffused through all the mansions of glory, by this illustrious medium of conveyance,

Jesus the Son of God: and there can be no night nor coldness, death nor darkness in this happy state of separate souls.

When the bodies of the saints shall be raised again, and reunited to their proper spirits, when they shall ascend to the place of their final heaven and supreme happiness, we know not what manner of bodies they shall be, what sort of senses they shall be furnished with, nor how many powers of conversing with the corporeal world shall be bestowed upon them. Whether they shall have such organs of sensation as eyes and ears, and stand in need of such light as we derive from the sun or moon, is not absolutely certain. The scripture tells us, it shall not be a body of flesh and blood: these are not materials refined enough for the heavenly state; "That which is corruptible cannot inherit incorruption." 1 Cor. xv. 50. But this we may be assured of, that whatever inlets of knowledge, whatever avenues of pleasure, whatever delightful sensations are necessary to make the inhabitants of that world happy, they shall be all united in that spiritual body which God will prepare for the new raised saints. If eyes and ears shall belong to that glorified body, those sensitive powers shall be nobly enlarged, and made more delightfully susceptible of richer shares of knowledge and joy.

Or what if we shall have that body furnished with such unknown mediums or organs of sensation as shall make light and sound, such as we here partake of, unnecessary to us? These organs shall certainly be such as shall transcend all the advantages that we receive in this present state from sounds or sunbeams. There shall be no disconsolate darkness, nor any tiresome silence there. There shall be no night to interrupt the business or the pleasures of that everlasting day.

Or what if the whole body shall be endued all over with the senses of seeing and hearing? What if these sort of sensations shall be diffused throughout all that immortal body, as feeling is diffused through all our present mortal flesh? What if God himself shall in a more illustrious manner irradiate all the powers of the body and spirit, and communicate the light of knowledge, holiness, and joy in a superior manner to what we can now conceive or imagine? This is certain, that darkness in every sense, with all the inconveniences and unhappy consequences of it, is and must be for ever banished from the heavenly state. "There is no night there."

When our Lord Jesus Christ shall have given up his mediatorial kingdom to the Father, and have presented all his saints spotless and without blemish before his throne, it is hard for us mortals in the present state to say, how far he shall be the everlasting medium of the communication of divine blessings to the happy inhabitants on high. Yet when we consider that the saints and angels and the whole happy creation are gathered together in him as their head,* it is certain they shall all be accounted in some sense his members; and it is highly probable he, as their head, shall be for ever active in communicating and diffusing the unknown blessings of that world amongst all the inhabitants of it who are gathered and united in him.

I come in the last place to make a few remarks upon the foregoing discourse, and in order to render them more effectual for our spiritual advantage, I shall consider the words of my text,

* The Greek word *anakephalaioo*, used in Eph. i. 10, favours this meaning, and perhaps Col. i. 20, includes the same thing.

"There shall be no night there," in their metaphorical or spiritual meaning, as well as in their literal sense. There is no night of ignorance or error in the mind, no night of guilt or of sorrow in the soul; but the blessed above shall dwell surrounded with the light of divine knowledge: they shall walk in the light of holiness, and they shall be for ever filled with the light of consolation and joy, as I have explained it at the beginning of this discourse.

The first remark then is this: When heaven, earth, and hell are compared together with relation to light and darkness, or night and day, we then see them in their proper distinctions and aspects. Every thing is set in its most distinguishing situation and appearance, when it is compared with things which are most opposite.

The earth on which we dwell during this state of trial, has neither all day nor all night belonging to it, but sometimes light appears and again darkness, whether in a natural or a spiritual sense.

Though there be long seasons of darkness in the winter, and darkness in the summer also in its constant returns divides one day from another, yet the God of nature has given us a larger portion of light than there is of darkness throughout the whole globe of the earth: and this benefit we receive by the remaining beams of the sun after its setting, and by the assistance of the moon and the stars of heaven. Blessed be God for the moon and stars as well as for the sun-beams and the brightness of noon. Blessed be God for all the lights of nature, but we still bless him more for the light of the gospel and for any rays from heaven, any beams of the Sun of Righteousness, which diffuse in lower measures knowledge and holiness and comfort among the inhabitants of this our world. God is here manifesting his love and

grace in such proportions as he thinks proper. Some beams of the heavenly world break out upon us here in this dark region. God, the spring of all our light, and the Lamb of God by his Spirit communicates sufficient light to us to guide us on in our way to that heavenly country.

In hell there is all night and darkness, thick darkness in every sense, for the God of glory is absent there as to any manifestations of his face and favour. And therefore it is often called "outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." There is no holiness, there is no comfort, there are no benefits of the creation, no blessings of grace; all are forfeited and gone for ever. It is everlasting night and blackness of darkness in that world: horror of soul without a beam of refreshment from the face of God or the Lamb for ever. The devils are now "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness to the judgment of the great day." Jude 6. But then their confinement shall be closer, and their darkness, guilt and sorrow shall be more overwhelming. Is it lawful for me in this place to mention the description which Milton, our English poet, gives of their wretched habitation?

A dungeon horrible on all sides round,
As one great furnace flam'd, yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Serv'd only to discover sights of wo;
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell; hope never comes,
That comes to all: but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery deluge fed
With ever-burning sulphur unconsum'd.
Such place eternal justice had prepared
For rebel-angels; here their pris'n ordain'd
In utter darkness, and their portion set,
As far remov'd from God and light of heav'n
As from the centre thrice to th' utmost pole.

To this the Poet adds,

O how unlike the place from whence they fell!

How unlike to that heaven which I have been describing, in which there is no night: and all the evils of darkness in every sense are for ever secluded from that happy region, where knowledge, holiness and joy are all inseparable and immortal.

2d Remark. What light of every kind we are made partakers of here on earth, let us use it with holy thankfulness, with zeal and religious improvement. Hereby we may be assisted and animated to travel on through the mingled stages and scenes of light and darkness in this world, till we arrive at the inheritance of the saints in perfect light. It is a glorious blessing to this dark world, that the light of Christianity is added to the light of Judaism and the light of nature; and that the law of Moses, and the gospel of Christ, are set before us in this nation in their distinct views, on purpose to make our way to happiness more evident and easy. May the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb be sung in our land! But let us never rest satisfied till the light that is let into our minds becomes a spring of divine life within us, a life of knowledge, holiness and comfort. Let us not be found amongst the number of those who when light is come into the world, love darkness rather than light, lest we fall under their condemnation. John iii. 19. Let us never rest till we see the evidences of the children of God wrought in us with power; till the day-spring that has visited us from on high has entered into our spirits, and refined and moulded them into the divine image; till we who are by nature all darkness are made light in the Lord.

O what a blessed change does the converting grace of Christ make in the soul of a son or daughter

of Adam? It is like the beauty and pleasure which the rising morning diffuses over the face of the earth after a night of storm and darkness: it is so much of heaven let into all the chambers of the soul: it is then only that we begin to know ourselves aright, and know God in his most awful and most lovely manifestations: it is in this light we see the hateful evil of every sin, the beauty of holiness, the worth of the gospel of Christ and of his salvation. It is a light that carries divine heat and life with it; it renews all the powers of the spirit, and introduces holiness, hope, and joy in the room of folly and guilt, sin, darkness and sorrow.

3d Remark. If God has wrought this sacred and divine change in our souls, if we are made the children of light, or if we profess to have felt this change, and hope for an interest in this bright inheritance of the saints, let us put away all the works of darkness with hatred and detestation. "Let us walk in the light" of truth and holiness. Eph. v. 8: "Ye were once darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light." And the apostle repeats his exhortation to the Thessalonians in 1 Epist. 5th chapter and the 5th verse: "Ye are all children of the light and of the day," and not the sons of night or darkness, therefore "let us watch and be sober; putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation; for God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."

To animate every Christian to this holy care and watchfulness, let us think what a terrible disappointment it will be, after we have made a bright profession of Christianity in our lives, to lie down in death in a state of sin and guilt, and to awake in the world of spirits in the midst of the groans and agonies of hell, surrounded and covered with everlasting darkness. Let our public profession be as illustrious and

bright as it will, yet if we indulge works of darkness in secret, night and darkness will be our eternal portion with the anguish of conscience and the terrors of the Almighty, without one glimpse of hope or relief. It is only those who walk in the light of holiness here who can be fit to dwell in the presence of a God of holiness hereafter. Light is sown only for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart; and it shall break out one day from amongst the clouds, a glorious harvest; but only the sons and daughters of light shall taste of the blessed fruits of it.

Think again with yourselves, when you are tempted to sin and folly, what if I should be cut off on a sudden practising the works of darkness, and my soul be summoned into the eternal world, covered with guilt and defilement? Shall I then be fit for the world of light? Will the God of light ever receive me to his dwelling? Do I not hereby render myself unfit company for the angels of light? And what if I should be sent down to dwell among the spirits of darkness, since I have imitated their sinful manners and obeyed their cursed influences?

O may such thoughts as these dwell upon our spirits with an awful solemnity, and be a perpetual guard against defiling our garments with any iniquity, lest our Lord should come and find us thus polluted. Let us walk onwards in the paths of light which are discovered to us in the word of God, and which are illustrated by his holy ordinances, to guide us through the clouds and shades which attend us in this wilderness, till our Lord Jesus shall come with all his surrounding glories, and take us to the full possession of the inheritance in light.

4th Remark. Under our darkest night, our most unactive and heavy hours, our most uncomfortable seasons here on earth, let us remember we are travelling to a world of light and joy. If we happen to

be awake in midnight darkness, and count the tedious hours one after another in a mournful succession, under any of the maladies of nature, or the sorrows of this life, let us comfort ourselves that we are not shut up in eternal night and darkness without hope, but we are still making our way towards that country where there is neither sin nor pain, malady nor sorrow.

What if the blessed God is pleased to try us by the withholding of light from our eyes for a season? What if we are called to seek our duty in the dark providences, or are perplexed in deep and difficult controversies wherein we cannot find the light of truth? What if we sit in darkness and mourning, and see no light, and the beams of divine consolation are cut off, let us still trust in the name of the Lord, and stay ourselves upon our God, especially as he manifests himself in the Lamb that was slain, the blessed medium of his mercy. Isa. l. 10. Let us learn to say with the prophet Micah, in the spirit of faith, Micah vii. 8, 9: "When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light unto me; he will bring me forth to the light and I shall behold his righteousness."

Blessed be God that the night of ignorance, grief, or affliction, which attends us in this world is not everlasting night. Heaven and glory are at hand; wait and watch for the morning star, for Jesus and the resurrection. Roll on apace in your appointed course, ye suns and moons, and all ye twinkling enlightners of the sky, carry on the changing seasons of light and darkness in this lower world with the utmost speed, till you have finished all my appointed months of continuance here. The light of faith shows me the dawning of that glorious day which shall finish all my nights and darknesses for ever. Make haste, O delightful morning,

and delay not my hopes. Let me hasten, let me arrive at that blessed inheritance, those mansions of Paradise where night is never known, but one eternal day shall make our knowledge, our holiness, and our joy eternal. Amen.

DISCOURSE VIII.

A SOUL PREPARED FOR HEAVEN.

2 Cor. v. 5.

Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing, is God.

When this apostle designs to entertain our hope in the noblest manner, and raise our faith to its highest joys, he generally calls our thoughts far away from all present and visible things, and sends them forward to the great and glorious day of the resurrection: he points our meditations to take a distant prospect of the final and complete happiness of the saints in heaven, when their bodies shall be raised shining and immortal; whereas it is but seldom that he takes notice of the heaven of separate souls, or that part of our future happiness which commences at the hour of death. But in this chapter the holy writer seems to keep both these heavens in his eye, and speaks of that blessedness with which the spirits of the just shall enjoy in the presence of the Lord, as soon as they are absent from the body, and yet

leads our souls onwards also to our last and most perfect state of happiness, which is delayed till our corruptible bodies shall be raised from the dust, and mortality shall be swallowed up in life. We know, saith he, in the first verse of this chapter, we know that as soon as our mortal tabernacle, in which we now dwell, is dissolved, we have a building ready for us in the heavens; i. e. an investiture in a glorious state of holiness and immortality, which waits to receive our spirits when we drop this dying flesh: yet the felicities of this paradise, or first heaven, shall receive an unspeakable addition and advancement, when Christ shall come the second time, with all his saints, to complete our salvation.

But which heaven soever we arrive at, whether it be this of the separate state, or that when our bodies shall be restored, still we must be wrought up to a proper fitness for it by God himself; and, as the end of this verse tells us, he gives us his own Spirit as an earnest of these future blessings.

The observation which shall be the subject of my discourse, is this: those who shall enjoy the heavenly blessedness hereafter, must be prepared for it here in this world, by the operation of the blessed God.

Here we must take notice in the first place, that since we are sinful and guilty creatures in ourselves, and have forfeited all our pretences to the favour of God and happiness, we must be restored to his favour, we must have our sins forgiven, we must be justified in his sight with an everlasting righteousness, we must be adopted as the children of God, and have a right and title given us to the heavenly inheritance, before we can enter into it, or possess it; and this blessing is procured for us by the obedience and death of the Son of God. It is in his blood that we find an atonement for our iniquities, and we must be made heirs of glory, by becoming the adopted children of God, and so we are joint-heirs

with his Son Jesus, and shall be glorified with him. Rom. viii. 17.

And it is by a true and living faith in the Son of God, that we become partakers of this blessing. God has "set forth his son Jesus as a propitiation for sinners through faith in his blood," Rom. iii. 24: "We are justified by faith in his blood, and have hope of eternal life through him," Rom. v. We also receive our adoption, and "become the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus," Gal. iii. 26; and thereby we obtain a title to some mansion in our Father's house in heaven, since Jesus our elder brother, and our forerunner, is admitted into it to take a place there in our name. This is a very considerable part of our necessary preparation for the heavenly world, that we should be believers in the Son of God, and united to him by a living faith; and this faith also is the gift of God, Eph. ii. 8. We are wrought up to it by his grace.

But as this does not seem to be the chief thing designed in the words of my text, I shall pass it over thus briefly, and apply myself to consider what that farther fitness or preparation for heaven intends, for which we are said here to be wrought up by God himself. The former preparation to heaven, may rather be said to be a relative change, which is included in our pardon or justification, and alters our state from the condemnation of hell, to the favour and love of God: but this latter preparation implies a real change of our nature by sanctifying grace, and gives us a temper of soul suited to the business and blessedness of the heavenly world. This is the preparation which my text speaks of.

The great inquiry therefore at present is, what are those steps, or gradual operations, by which the blessed God works up to this fitness for heaven.

And here I shall not run over all the parts and lineaments of the new creature, which is formed by

regeneration, nor the particular operations of converting grace, whereby we are convinced of sin, and led to faith and repentance, and new obedience, though these are all necessary to this end; but I shall confine myself only to those things which have a more immediate reference to the heavenly blessedness, and they are such as follow.

1. God works us up to a preparation for the heavenly felicity, by establishing and confirming our belief, that there is a heaven provided for the saints, and by giving us some clearer acquaintance with the nature, the business, and the blessedness of this heaven. All this is done by the gospel of Christ, and by the secret operation of the blessed God, teaching us to understand his gospel.

Alas! how ignorant were the heathen sages about any future state for the righteous? How bewildered were the best of them in all their imaginations? How vain were all their reasonings upon this subject, and how little satisfaction could they give to an honest inquirer, whether there was any reward provided for good men beyond this life? The light of nature was their guide; and those in whom this feeble taper burnt with the fairest lustre, were still left in great darkness about futurity. As the Gentile philosophers were left in great uncertainties whether there was any heaven or no, so were their conceptions of heavenly things very absurd and ridiculous; and their various fancies about the nature and enjoyments of it, were all impertinence.

And how little knowledge had the patriarchs themselves, if we may judge of their knowledge by the five books of Moses, which give no plain and express promise of future happiness in another world, neither to Abel nor Noah, to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or to Moses himself? And were it not for some expressions in the New Testament, and by that eleventh chapter to the Hebrews, where we are

told, that these good men "sought a heavenly country," and hoped for happiness in a future and invisible state, we should sometimes be ready to doubt whether they knew almost any thing of the future resurrection and glory.

That great and excellent man Job, had one or two lucid intervals of peculiar brightness, which shone upon him from heaven, in the midst of his distresses, and raised him above and beyond the common level of the dispensation he lived in: yet in the main, when he describes the state of the dead, how desolate and dolesome is his language, and what heavy darkness hangs upon his hope! See his expressions, Job x. 21, 22: "Let me alone that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness, and the shadow of death, a land of darkness as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death without any order, and where the light is as darkness." Mark how this good man heaps one darkness upon another, and makes so formidable a gloom as was hardly to be dispelled by the common notices given to men in that age.

And if we look into the Jewish writings in and after the days of Moses, we find the men of righteousness frequently entertained with promises of corn, and wine, and oil, and other blessings of sense; and few there were amongst them who saw clearly, and firmly believed the heavenly inheritance through the types, and shadows, and figures of Canaan, the promised land, which flowed with milk and honey.

It is granted there are some hints and discoveries of a blessedness beyond the grave in the writings of David, Isaiah, Daniel, and some of the prophets: but the brightest of these notices fall far short of what the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ has set before us. The Son of God, who came down from

heaven, where he had lived from before the creation of this world, has revealed to us infinitely more of the invisible state than all that went before him: he tells us of the pure in heart enjoying the sight of God, and conversing with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the ancient saints; he assures us there are many mansions in his Father's house, and that he went to prepare a place there for his followers. "I tell you," says he, John viii. 38, "I tell you the things which I have seen with my Father." And when he came again from the dead, he made it appear to his disciples that he had brought life and immortality to light by his gospel, 2 Tim. i. 10.

It is only the New Testament that gives us so bright and satisfactory an account what our future heaven is: the righteous shall be with God, shall behold him, shall dwell with Christ, and see his glory; they shall worship day and night in his temple, and sing the praises of him that sits upon the throne, and of the Lamb that has redeemed them by his blood; there shall be no sin, no sorrow, no death, nor any more pain; they shall have such satisfactions and employments as are worthy of a rational nature, and a soul refined from sense and sin. St. Paul, one of his disciples, was transported into the third heaven before he died, and there learnt unspeakable things, 2 Cor. xii. 2, 4; and he, together with the other apostles, have published the glories of that future world which they learnt from Jesus their Lord, and confirmed these things to our faith by prophecies and miracles without number.

Now the blessed God himself prepares his own people for this heaven of happiness, by giving them a full conviction and assurance of the truth of all these divine discoveries; he impresses them upon their heart with power, and makes them attend to those divine impressions. Every true Christian has learnt to say within himself, "this celestial blessedness

is no dream, is no painted vision, no gay scene of flattering fancy, nor is it a matter of doubtful dispute, or of uncertain opinion. I am assured of it from the words of Christ the Son of God, and from his blessed followers, whom he authorized to teach me the things of a future world. He that is taught of God beholds these glories in the light of a divine faith which is to him the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not yet seen, Heb. xi. 1.

2. God works up the souls of his people to a preparation for the heavenly state by purifying them from every defilement that might unfit them for the blessedness of heaven. The removal of the guilt of sin by his pardoning mercy I have mentioned before, as necessary to our entrance into the heavenly state: and we must walk through this world, this defiling world, with all holy watchfulness, lest our soul be blemished with new pollutions, lest new guilt come upon our consciences, and the thoughts of appearance before God be terrible to us. That soul is very much unfit for an entrance into the presence of a holy God, who is ever plunging itself into new circumstances of guilt, by a careless and unholy conversation. To stand upon the borders of life, and the very edge of eternity, will be dreadful to those who have given themselves a loose to criminal pleasures, and indulged their irregular appetites and passions.

But it is not only a conscience purged from the guilt of sin by the blood of Christ, but a soul washed also from the defiling power and taint of sin by the sanctifying Spirit that is necessary to make us meet for the heavenly inheritance. This is that purification which I now chiefly intend, Matt. v. 8: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Nothing that defileth must enter into the city of God on high, nor whosoever maketh a lie or loveth it," Rev. xxi. 27. No injustice, no falsehood, no guile or

deceit, can be admitted within those gates: they must be without guile both in their heart and tongue, if they will stand before the throne of God, Rev. xiv. 5. Sincerity and truth of soul, with all the beauties of an upright heart and character, are necessary to prepare an inhabitant for that blessed state. There must be no envy, no wrath or malice, no revenge, nor any of the angry principles that dwell in our flesh and blood, or that inflame and disturb the mind, will be found in those regions of peace and love. There must be no pride or ambition, no self-exaltation and vanity that can dwell in heaven; for it cast out the angels of glorious degree, when they would exalt themselves above their own station. "Pride was the condemnation of the devil," and it must not dwell in a human heart that ever hopes for a heavenly dwelling-place, 1 Tim. iii. 6, and Jude, ver. 6. There must be no sensual and intemperate creature there, no covetous selfishness, no irregular passions, no narrowness of soul, no uncharitable and party spirit will ever be found in that country of diffusive love and joy.

And since the best of Christians have had the seeds of many of these iniquities in their hearts, and they have made a painful complaint of these rising corruptions of nature upon many occasions, these iniquities must be mortified and slain by the work of the Spirit of God within us, if ever we ourselves would live the divine life of heaven, Rom. viii. 13. There is a great deal of this purifying work to be done in the souls of all of us, before we can be prepared for the heavenly world, and though we cannot arrive at perfection here, yet we must be wrought up to a temper in some measure fit to enter into that blessedness: and God is training his people up for this purpose all the days of their travels through this desert world. Happy souls, who feel themselves more and more released from the bonds of these ini-

quities, day by day, and thereby feel within themselves the growing evidences of a joyful hope!

3. God does not purify us from every sin in order to prepare us for heaven, but he is ever loosening and weaning our hearts from all those lawful things in life which are not to be enjoyed in heaven. Our sensual appetites, and our carnal desires, so far as they are natural, though not sinful, must die before we can enter into eternal life. Flesh and blood cannot inherit that divine, incorruptible, and refined happiness. Riches and treasures of gold and silver which the rust can corrupt, and which thieves can break through and steal, are not provided for the heavenly state: they are all of the earthly kind, and too mean for the relish of a heavenly spirit. Although a Christian may possess many of these things in the present life, yet his affections must be divested of them and his soul divided from them, if he would be a saint indeed, and ever ready for the purer blessings of paradise. The businesses, the cares and the concerns of this secular life, are ready to drink up our spirits too much while we are here; we are too prone to mingle our very souls with them, and thereby grow unfit for heavenly felicities: and therefore it is that our Saviour has warned us, Luke xxi. 34: "Let not your hearts be overcharged with the cares of this world any more than with surfeiting and drunkenness," if you would be always ready for your flight to a better state, and meet the summons of your Lord to paradise.

There are also many curious speculations and delightful amusements which may lawfully entertain us while we are here; there are sports and recreations which may divert the flesh or the mind in a lawful manner, whilst we dwell in tabernacles of flesh and blood, and are encompassed with mortal things: but the soul that is wrought for heaven must arise to a holy indifference to all the entertainments of flesh

and sense, and time, if it would put on the appearance of a heavenly inhabitant. Christians that would be ever ready for the glories of a better world must be such in some measure as the apostle describes, 1 Cor. vii. 29, &c. They must rejoice with such moderation in their dearest comforts of life as though they rejoiced not, they must weep and mourn for the loss of them with such a divine self-government as though they wept not, they must buy as though they possessed not, they must use this world as not abusing it in any instance, but must look upon the fashions and the scenes of it as vanishing things, and have their hearts "set on the things that are above, where Christ Jesus is at the Father's right hand," Col. iii. 1, 2.

If you ask me what methods the blessed God uses in order to attain these ends, and to purify and refine the soul for heaven, I answer, he sometimes does it by sharp strokes of affliction, making our interests in the creature bitter to us, that we may be weaned from the relish of them, and the power of divine grace must accompany all his weaning providences, or the work will not be done.

Sometimes again he weans the soul from the lawful things of this world, by permitting our earthly enjoyments to plunge us into difficulties, to seize the heart with anxieties, or to surround us with sore temptations: then, when we feel ourselves falling into sin, and bruised or defiled thereby, we lose our former gust of pleasure in them; and when we are recovered by divine grace, we are more effectually weaned from such kind of temptations for the future; but it is impossible in the compass of a few lines to describe the various methods which the blessed God uses to wean the spirit from all its earthly attachments, and to work it up to a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Blessed souls, who are thus loosened and weaned from

sensible things, though it be done by painful sufferings!

4. The great God not only weans our hearts from those things that are not to be enjoyed in heaven, but he gives us a holy appetite and relish suited to the provisions of the heavenly world, and raises our desires and tendencies of soul toward them. By nature our minds are estranged from God, and from all that is divine and holy; we have no desires after his love, nor delight in the thoughts of dwelling with God: but when divine grace has effectually touched the heart, it ever tends upwards to that world of holiness and peace. So the needle, when it is touched by the loadstone, ever points to the beloved pole-star, and seems uneasy when it is diverted from it, nor will it rest till it return thither again.

Do the sweet sensations of divine love make up a great part of the heavenly blessedness? The soul is in some measure fitted for it, who can say with David in Psal. iv. 6, "Lord, lift thou up upon me the light of thy countenance, and it shall rejoice my heart more than if corn, and wine, and oil abounded," and all earthly blessings were multiplied upon me; for in thy love is the life of my soul, and thy "loving-kindness is better than life." Psal. lxiii.

Is the felicitating presence of God to be enjoyed in the future world, and shall we see his face there with unspeakable delight? Then those souls are prepared for heaven, who can say with the Psalmist, Psalm xlii. 2, "When shall I come and appear before God?" When shall I have finished my travels through this wilderness, that I may arrive at my Father's house? "This one thing have I desired, that I may dwell in the house of God for ever, to behold the beauty of the Lord there," Psal. xxvii. 4. It is enough for me that I shall behold thy face in

righteousness, and I shall be satisfied when I awake out of the dust with thy likeness. With my soul have I desired thee, O Lord, in the night, in the darkness of this desert world I have longed for the light of thy face, "and with my spirit within me I will seek thee early. Whom have I in heaven but thee, neither is there any on earth that I desire beside thee." Psalm xvii. Isa. xxvi. Psalm lxxiii. O when shall the day come when there shall be no more distance and estrangement of my heart from God, but I shall feel all my powers for ever near him?

Is the sweet society of Jesus to be enjoyed in the heavenly region, then those are prepared for this happiness who feel in themselves a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better than the most pleasurable scenes on earth, Phil. i. 23: "I am willing and rejoice in the thought of it rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord," 2 Cor. v. 8. I behold in the light of faith the dawning glory of that day when Jesus shall return from heaven, when he shall revisit this wretched world, and put an end to these wretched scenes of vanity. "Behold he cometh in the clouds and every eye shall see him." He comes into our world to them that look for him, not to be made a sacrifice for sin, but to complete our salvation. I long to behold him, and I love the thought of his appearance, Rev. i. Heb. ix. 2 Tim. iv. &c.

Is there not only a freedom from pain and sorrow among the saints on high, but is there also an eternal release from all the bonds of sin and temptation? Then that soul discovers a degree of preparation for it, who can say with a holy groan and grief of heart, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?" Rom. vii. "In this tabernacle we groan indeed being burdened, and are desirous rather to be clothed

upon with our house which is from heaven," with our holy state of immortality, 2 Cor. v. 4. That God who has wrought these divine breathings in the soul will one day fulfil them all, and he is working up the Christian to a blessed meetness for this felicity by awakening these wishes in the very centre of the heart. Happy heart, which feels these holy aspirations, these divine breathings!

5. The blessed God is pleased to work us up to a preparation for the heavenly world by forming the temper of our minds into a likeness to the inhabitants of heaven, i. e. to God himself, to Jesus the Son of God, to angels and saints, to the spirits of the just made perfect. From the children of folly and sin we must be transformed into the children of God, we must be created anew after his image and resemble our heavenly Father, that we may be capable of enjoying his love, and rejoicing in his presence. We must be conformable to the image of his only begotten Son Christ Jesus, and walk and live as he did in this world, that we may be prepared to dwell with him in the world to come, Rom. viii. 29. 1 John iv. 17. We must have the same temper and spirit of holiness wrought in us, that we may be imitators of all the holy ones that dwell in heaven, and that we may be followers of the saints who have been strangers and travellers in this world in all former ages.

How can we hope to have free conversation with glorious beings, which are so unlike to ourselves, as God, and Christ, and angels, are unlike to the sinful children of men? How can we imagine ourselves to be fit company for such pure and perfect beings, beauteous, and shining in holiness, while we are defiled with the iniquities of our natures, and ever falling into new guilt and pollution? Happy souls, who can say, through grace, I have walked in the light as God is in the light, and I

trust, O Father, I shall dwell for ever with thee there. I have been a follower of the Lamb through the thorny and rugged passages of this wilderness, and I humbly hope I shall sit with thee, O Jesus, upon a throne, glorious and holy. I have been a companion of them who have finished the Christian race, who have fought the good fight, and obtained the victory, and I trust I shall have a name and a place amongst all yon holy ones who have fought and overcome. O for a heart and tongue furnished for such appeals to all the blessed inhabitants of Paradise, the possessors of those mansions on high!

6. The grace of God works us up to a preparation for heaven by carrying us through those trials and sufferings, those labours and conflicts here in this life, which will not only make heaven the sweeter to us, but will make it more honourable for God himself to bestow this heaven upon us.

When the spirits of a creature are almost worn out with the toilsome labours of the day, what an additional sweetness does he find in rest and repose? What an inward relish and satisfaction to the soul, that has been fatigued under a long and tedious war with sins and temptations, to be transported to such a place where sin cannot follow them, and temptation can never reach them? How will it enhance all the felicities of the heavenly world, when we enter into it, to feel ourselves released from all the trials and distresses and sufferings which we have sustained in our travels thitherwards? The review of the waves and the storms wherein we had been tossed for a long season, and had been almost shipwrecked there, will make the peaceful haven of eternity, to which we shall arrive, much more agreeable to every one of the sufferers, 2 Cor. iv. 17: "Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment," are in this way working

for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and preparing us for the possession of it.

But it should be added also, that the pride of life, and the crown of glory, is much more honourably bestowed on those who have been long fighting, running, and labouring to obtain it. Heaven will appear as a condecent reward of all the faithful servants of God upon earth, and a divine recompense of their labours and sufferings, 2 Thess. i. 6, As "it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, so to give to those who are troubled rest and salvation." This is that equitable or condecent fitness that God, as Governor of the world, has wisely appointed and made necessary before our entrance into heaven. Christ himself our forerunner, and the Captain of our salvation, was made perfect through sufferings, and was trained up for his throne on high by enduring the contradiction of sinners, and the variety of agonies which attended his life and death in this lower world, this stage of conflict and sufferings. See Heb. ii. 10, and xii. 1.

Though we cannot pretend by our labours in the race to have merited the prize, yet we must labour through the race before we receive it. Our conflicts cannot pretend to have deserved the crown which is promised, but we must fight the battles of the Lord before we obtain it. This was St. Paul's encouragement and hope, 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge will give me, and not to me only, but to all those who love his appearance." There is a great deal of divine wisdom in this appointment, that the children of God may be "counted in this sense worthy of his kingdom for which they also suffer," 2 Thess. i. 5; and

that the relish of those satisfactions may be doubled to all the sufferers.

7. God yet farther prepares and works up his people for heaven by teaching them some of the employments of the heavenly world, and initiating and inuring them to the practice thereof. Is the contemplation of the blessed God in his nature and his various perfections the business of glorified souls? God teaches his children, whom he is training up for glory, to practise this holy contemplation: he fixes their thoughts upon the wonders of his nature and his grace, his works of creation and providence, the blessings of his redeeming love by his Son Jesus, and the terrors of his justice which shall be executed by the same hand, while the soul at the same time can appeal to God with holy delight, my meditation of thee shall be sweet indeed: O may I dwell for ever in the midst of thy light, and see all thy wondrous glories diffused around me, and make my joys everlasting.

Are we told that heaven consists also in "beholding the glory of Christ," John xvii. 24. And how happily does God prepare his saints for this part of heaven, by filling their thoughts with the various graces and honours of Jesus the Saviour? And when they are in their lonely retirements, they trace the footsteps of their beloved through all his labours and sorrows in this mortal state, even from his cradle to his cross; they follow him in their holy meditations to his agonies in the garden, to his anguish of soul there; through all his sufferings in death, through the grave his bed of darkness, and trace him on still to his glorious resurrection, and to his ascent to his Father's house, when a bright cloud like a chariot of fire bore him up to heaven with attending angels: This is my beloved, says the soul, and this is my friend, whom I shall see in the upper world: he is altogether lovely, and he demands my highest love.

Is it part of the happiness of heaven to converse with the blessed God by holy addresses of acknowledgments and praise, as it is described in Rev. iv. and v. and vii: "They are before the throne of God day and night, and serve him in his temple," and join with holy joy to pronounce that divine song, "Blessing and honour, and glory and power, be to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever: worthy art thou, O Lord, to receive glory and honour, for thou hast created all things for thy pleasure: worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and strength, glory and blessing; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood out of every kindred and nation?" Now it is evident that those whose hearts and lips are joyfully fitted to pronounce this holy song, and to join in this harmony, are fitted also for these blessed employments of the heavenly state: and yet at the same time they abase themselves in the dust of humility, and with the living creatures or angels they fall down before the throne, and with the elders they cast down their crowns at his feet, they confess themselves the sons of earth and dust, and would appear as nothing while God is all, Rev. iv. 9, 10, and v. 8.

Are all the powers of glorified nature in heaven active in the unknown services of God and Christ there? So the saints are trained up for this service and this activity here on earth, by diligence and delight in their less noble employments, the inferior labours and duties that Providence demands of them here, whereby they are prepared for more glorious employment on high; for heaven is no idle or unactive state.

Do some of the satisfactions of the heavenly world arise from the sweet society of the blessed above, their fervent love to each other, their mutual delight in holy converse, the joy that arises in the heart of each

upon a survey of the happiness of all the holy and blessed inhabitants? Does benevolence and goodness of every kind overflow in the heavenly world? It is plain that God is training up his own children for this blessedness, by employing them in this manner while they are here below: he is in some measure fitted for this heaven, who can say the saints are the excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight: I love them from my soul, because they love my God and my Saviour. I see the image of the Father, and of Jesus his Son in them, and I cannot but love that image wheresoever I behold it. I feel myself ready to rejoice when my fellow Christians partake of joy, and I long for that temper of mind when I shall delight myself in the felicity of all my fellow saints in perfection, and shall make their heaven a part of my own. But I proceed not here, because this would anticipate what I design hereafter.

8. God is pleased to work up his people to a preparation for the heavenly state by giving them a pledge and earnest of the blessedness of heaven, that is, by sending his own Spirit into their hearts under this very character, both as the spring of a divine life and as the evidence of our hope, and sometimes bestowing upon them such foretastes of the heavenly world, by the operations of his Holy Spirit, which are too joyful and glorious to be fully expressed in mortal language; but we shall attempt something of it in another discourse.

I proceed now to seek what inferences or edifying remarks may be made upon our meditations thus far.

Remark 1. We learn from my text what are the brightest, the plainest, and the surest evidences of our interest in the heavenly blessedness: are trained up to it, and prepared for it? Has the blessed God wrought up our souls to any hopeful degrees of this preparation? Has he in any measure made us meet for this inheritance of the saints in light?

I grant the scripture teaches us, that it is by a true and living faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, that we obtain a title to eternal life, according to the proposals of the covenant of grace in the gospel; but our preparation for heaven by a holy and heavenly temper of mind and conduct of life, is the fairest and most uncontested evidence of the truth and life of our faith, and such a proof of it, as will stand the test both in life and death, in this world, and in the world to come. If we would manifest our faith in Christ to be sincere and genuine, and effectual for our salvation, we must make it appear that we are growing up into the image of Christ in all things, we must be formed after the likeness of the Son of God, who is our great example and our fore-runner into heaven; and where this evidence is found the soul cannot fail of salvation. Wheresoever there is this fitness for the joys on high, God will assuredly bestow these divine pleasures. It is for such souls that he has prepared a heaven, and when he has prepared such souls for the heavenly world, he will surely bring them to the possession of it.

Of how great moment and importance is it then for each of us to examine ourselves with watchful diligence and sincerity, whether we are in any measure fitted for the blessedness above: and to this end we may run over in our inquiries all the former steps of preparation.

Let us inquire of our souls then, Am I so fully persuaded of this state of future happiness, as to resolve, this shall be my aim, this my everlasting pursuit? Have we seen this blessedness in the various representations of it in the word of God as the most amiable and desirable thing, and have we set our faces to travel thither with a holy purpose and determination, through grace, never to tire or grow weary till we arrive at the enjoyment of it? Have we fixed our hope and expectation upon the blessed pro-

mises in the word, and are we by these promises endeavouring daily to cleanse ourselves from all defilements of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God? Do we obtain any victories over our spiritual enemies, and maintain our pious conflicts against all the oppositions which we meet with in our way? Do we labour to suppress every rising ferment of envy, pride, wrath, sensuality, and those corrupt appetites and passions which render us unfit for that holy and heavenly world? Are our hearts daily more mortified to the things of this world, the enjoyments of flesh and sense, which are not to be found in heaven? Are our hearts more weaned from the sensual satisfactions and intemperate delights of the animal life? Are we dead to the temptations of gold and silver, the grandeurs and the gaieties, and splendour of this present low life of flesh and blood, which are no part nor portion of the heavenly felicity? Do we view the tempting things of this world, with a holy indifference, and possess and use them with affections so calm, and so cool, as becomes a rank of beings that have a nobler, a richer, and a more exalted hope? Have we found the labours and burdens, the sorrows and afflictions of the present state, happy instruments to prepare us for the blessedness above, by curing all our vain and carnal desires? Are we in any measure imitators of those who have gone before us through faith and patience, and are made possessors of the promised joy? Are we followers of God as dear children? Have we the image of our heavenly Father created anew in us, and do we walk as our Lord Jesus Christ also walked, while he was in this wilderness travelling to his Father's house? Are our earnest desires towards this sort of felicity excited and raised high? Have we a strong tendency of soul to the holy enjoyments of the upper world? Do we sigh and groan after a complete freedom from sin, and a deliverance

from every temptation? Do we employ ourselves with pleasure in the work and business of heaven, in the holy contemplation of God, in a delightful survey of the person and offices of his Son Jesus, his wondrous condescension, and his amazing compassion? Do we take pleasure in conversing with God our Father by holy addresses of praise and thankfulness? Do we love all the saints, and delight in their society, and do we rejoice to spend our time with them in heavenly conversation, though they may be amongst the lower ranks of life here on earth? And do we diffuse our love through all who wear the image of God, and take a pleasing satisfaction of soul in their increase in holiness, and rejoice in their joys?

If God has thus fitted thee, O Christian, in this manner for the mansions of the happy world, then surely he has set thee apart for himself, he has begun eternal life in thee, the dawn of eternal glory is risen upon thee, and he will bring thee into the complete noon of blessedness, into the overflowing light of divine beatitudes. Arise and shine, O Christian, for thy light is come, the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee: thou hast no need to ascend into heaven to search for thy evidences among the decrees of God, and to pry into the rolls of electing grace; for if thou hast been transformed into a heavenly temper, thy name is surely written in the Lamb's book of life; heaven is begun within thee, and God will fulfil his own work.

Remark 2. What a solid comfort is it to poor, mourning, troubled, afflicted souls under all their sorrows, their frailties, their temptations, and infirmities here on earth, that they have a clear evidence of heaven within them. This is such a peace as Jesus Christ left to his disciples by legacy, John xiv. 27. Such as the world cannot give, and such as the world cannot take away.

This is a spring of constant and divine consolation

to those who seem to be worn out with old age or infirmities of nature, and they complain they are fit for no service in this world; but if they can feel in themselves this holy fitness for the enjoyments of heaven, they have a rich and living fountain of pleasure in their own breasts, ever springing, ever flowing, and such as will follow them with daily supplies of pleasure, if they are not wanting to themselves, through all this wilderness, till they arrive at that land where all the rivers of blessing meet and join in a full stream, to make the inhabitants for ever happy.

It may be, O Christian, thou art afraid that thou hast felt but little of this divine preparation; thou seest so many defects in thyself daily, so much unlikeness to God, so much working of iniquity, such restless efforts of the body of sin, so much prevalence of temptation, so much coldness in duty, such deadness in acts of devotion, such frequent returns of guilt and pain in a tender conscience, and so many enemies to struggle within every step of thy way to heaven, that thou art greatly discouraged and afraid this divine preparation is not wrought in thee. Inquire then yet further, are all these melancholy scenes both within and without, the matter of thy sincere grief and burden? Canst thou say in this tabernacle, I groan, being burdened with the body of sin, as well as with the frailties and pains of nature? Canst thou say sincerely, that thy inmost desires are towards God and his glory in the present life, and towards his enjoyment in the life to come? Dost thou maintain a constant converse with heaven as well as thou canst, though it be so much broken, and so often painfully interrupted? Hast thou a continual and settled aversion and hatred to sin, and a holy jealousy and fear of its defilements? Hast thou a restless breathing of soul after greater likeness to God, and greater communion with him? Dost thou delight in spiritual and holy con-

versation, and does thy zeal for the honour of God and his Son Jesus, carry thee forth to those actions which are suitable to thy station, for the advancement of religion in the world? Be assured then that God is training thee up for this heavenly state, and has in some measure prepared thee for it. God has begun in thee the business and blessedness of the upper world. In the midst of all thy sorrows and complaints here below, peace be with thee, and joy in the Lord, for thy salvation and thy felicity shall be completed.

Remark 3. How vain, and idle, and unreasonable are all the hopes of sinners, that they shall ever arrive at heaven without any preparation for it here? There is nothing divine and holy begun in them in this world, and yet they hope to be made happy in the world that is to come; there is nothing of true grace wrought in their hearts here, and yet they vainly expect to be made perfect in pleasure and glory hereafter.

Think with thyself, O carnal creature, that heaven will be a burden to thee; the powers, the appetites, and passions of thy sinful nature, will not suffer thee to relish the joys of the heavenly state. Dost thou imagine that a worm or serpent of the earth, or a swine which is ever tumbling in the mire, can be entertained with the golden ornaments and splendours of a palace? Or will the stupid ass be delighted with the harmony of the harp or viol? No more can a soul of a carnal and sensual taste, and which is ever seeking and grovelling after earthly gratifications, be pleased or gratified with the refined enjoyments of the heavenly world. Thou must have a new nature, new appetites and affections, ere thou canst partake of divine joys, or relish them if thou wert placed in the midst of them. Holy adoration of God, and humble converse with him in worship, converse with the saints about divine things, perfect purity and devotion, with the meditation of the excellencies of

Christ, and the sight of him in his ordinances, have never yet been the object of thy delight or joy: nay, they have rather been thine aversion; and shouldst thou have the gates of heaven open before thee, and see what business the holy souls there are employed in, thou wouldst find no desire to such sort of satisfactions; the place and the company would be thy burden, if thou couldst be let at once into the midst of them.

Think again, O sinful wretch, thy carnality of soul, thy supreme love of sensual and brutal joys, the secret malice or envy, the pride and impiety of thy heart, have prepared thee for another sort of company; thou art fitted for hell by the very temper of thy spirit, for such are the inhabitants of that miserable world, and in thy present state there can be no admission for thee into heaven. Thou hast treasured up food for the worm that never dies, for the eternal anguish of conscience; thou hast made thyself fit fuel by indulgence of thy sinful and rebellious appetites and passions, for the fiery indignation of God; and every day thou persistest in this state, thy preparation for the dark regions of sin and sorrow is increased. But this leads me to the last remark.

Remark 4. How dangerous a thing it is for a sinner to continue a day longer in a state so unprepared for the heavenly world. Dost thou not know, whilst we are inhabitants in these regions of mortality, we are borderers upon death; and if we are unprepared for heaven, we are borderers upon damnation and hell? Our life is but a vapour, and the next puff may blow us away into the regions of everlasting darkness, misery, and despair.

Alas! how much of this divine preparation do the best of saints stand in need of for an immediate entrance into heaven? What care do they take, how constant are their labours, and how fervent

their prayers to increase in this divine fitness, in these holy and heavenly qualifications! and dost thou vainly imagine to exchange earth for heaven at once, and to be received into the pure and holy mansions of paradise, without any conformity to God or Christ, or the rest of the inhabitants of that world?

Objection. But some idle and slothful creatures will be ready to object and say, If it be God who creates his people anew, according to his own image, and fits them for heaven; if we must be wrought up by his power and grace for the participation of this glory, what can we do towards it ourselves? Or why are we charged and exhorted to prepare ourselves for heaven? Since then it is God must do this work, why may we not lie still, and wait till his grace shall prepare us?

I answer, No, by no means; for God is wont to exert his grace only while creatures are in the use of his appointments, and fulfil their duty. This language therefore, and these excuses, seem to be the mere cavils of a carnal mind, or the voice of sloth and indolence. Those who have no inclination to prepare themselves for the joys of the heavenly state, may wait and expect divine influences in vain, if they will never stir up themselves to practise what is in their own power, or to attempt what the gospel of grace demands.

In almost all the transactions of God with men, it is the way of his wisdom to join our diligence and his grace together; and there are many scriptures that give us sufficient notice of this. See how St. Paul argues with the Philippians, and stirs them up to zeal and activity in securing their own salvation by the hope of divine assistances: Phil. ii. 12, 13: "Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do." So said David to his son Solomon, when he appointed him to build the temple of the Lord, 1 Chron. xxviii. 20:

"Be strong and of good courage, and do it, for the Lord God, even my God, will be with thee, and will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, till thou hast finished all the work." This was the charge also that God gave to his people Israel, Lev. xx. 7: "Sanctify yourselves, and be ye holy, keep my statutes; I am the Lord who sanctify you." So the Psalmist tells us, Psal. iv. 3: "The Lord hath set apart, (or separated,) him who is godly for himself;" and yet, 2 Cor. vi. 17: The Lord commands his people to separate themselves unto him, to come out from amongst the sinners of this world; "and be you separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you." So in other places of scripture, divine wisdom commands sinners to fulfil their duty, Prov. i. 23: "Turn ye at my reproof:" and yet in the 80th Psalm, the church prays, "Turn us, O Lord, and we shall be saved." The case is very much the same even in the things that relate to this life, wherein divine assistance and blessing are connected with our diligence in duty. Solomon tells us, Prov. x. 4: "The hand of the diligent maketh rich;" and yet ver. 22, "It is the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich also." We can never expect the favours of Heaven, unless we are zealous to obey the commands of Heaven.

When the sinful children of men are found waiting on God in his own appointed ordinances, then they are in the fairest way to receive divine communications, and to be transformed into saints. If the blind man had not obeyed the voice of Christ, John ix. 7, and washed himself in the pool of Siloam, he could not expect to have received his eye-sight. If the man with the withered hand, Matt. xii. 10, 13, had not used his own endeavours to stretch forth his hand at the command of Christ, I can hardly believe it would have been restored to its ancient vigour and usefulness. If the poor impotent creature had not been waiting at the side of the pool in Bethesda, John

v. he had not met with the blessed Jesus, nor had been healed by his miraculous power. You will say, perhaps, that our blessed Saviour could have visited him in his own house, could have directed his journey toward his habitation, or have sent for him into the public, and healed him there. No: our Lord did not choose either of these ways; but while the man was waiting at the pool, where he had encouragement to hope for a cure, there the Lord found him, and healed him.

Let not any presuming sinner therefore, who is sensible of his own unfitness for heaven, dare to continue in a careless indifference about so important a concern: let him not put off his own conscience with this foolish excuse, It is God must do all in us and for us, and therefore I will do nothing myself. Dost thou think, O soul, that this will be a sufficient answer to him that shall judge thee in the great and solemn day? May you not expect to hear the Judge reply terribly to such an excuse, "You never sought after this preparation for heaven, and you must be plunged into hell, for which your own rebellion and slothfulness have prepared you."

But perhaps you will object again, what can so feeble, so sinful a creature as I am, do towards this divine work?

I answer, canst thou not separate one quarter of an hour daily to think of thy dreadful circumstances, and thine eternal danger in a sinful and defiled state of soul? Think of the uncertainty of life, and how sudden thy summons may be into the eternal and unchangeable state. Survey thyself in thy sinful condition both of heart and life, and see how unfit thou art for the company of all the holy ones above. Meditate on these thy perilous circumstances, till thy heart be deeply affected therewith; fall down before God in humble acknowledgment of thy former guilt and pollutions; give up thyself to him with holy solemnity,

to have the heart turned away from every sin, and strongly inclined to holiness and heaven. Commit thy soul, guilty and defiled as it is, into the hands of Jesus the Mediator; intrust thy case with him as an all-sufficient Saviour; entreat that he would cleanse thee from all thy guilt and pollution, by the blood of his sacrifice, and the grace of his Spirit; that blood of atonement which has procured for sinners pardon and peace with God, and those operations of his grace which may sanctify thy sinful nature. Address thyself to the exalted Saviour for healing influences from his hand to cure all the maladies of thy soul, to form thee after his image, and to make thee a son of God. Pray with holy importunity for this necessary and divine blessing, wait on God in secret and in public; give him no rest night or day till he has renewed thy soul, and transformed thee into a new creature, and given thee a relish of the heavenly enjoyments: dwell at the throne of grace till thou feelest thy heart drawn upward and heavenward, and watch against every thing that would defile thy soul anew, or make thee unfit to enter into the company of the blessed.

Permit me here to dwell a little upon those motives that should awaken thee to bethink thyself ere it be too late, before the grave has shut its mouth upon thee, and thou art consigned to the place of eternal misery. Awake, awake, O impenitent sinners, who are as yet unprepared for the business and blessedness of the heavenly state; awake and exert your souls in warmest reflections on matters of infinite importance.

(1.) Think with yourselves how much the great God has done towards the preparation of sinful men for this heaven; think seriously of his long-suffering goodness, and his sparing mercy, which should have led you long ago to a melting sense of your own folly, and brought you back unto him by humble

repentance. For what reason were his patience and his long-suffering exercised towards you, if not for this very purpose? Rom. ii. 4. Think of the blessings of nature with which he has surrounded you, and the comforts of this life wherewith he has furnished you, in order to allure your thoughts towards him, who is the spring of all goodness; and to raise your desires towards him: it is he invites you, who will be the everlasting portion and happiness of his people, and in whose favour consists life and felicity; and dare not any longer neglect your preparation for this happiness, which consists in the enjoyment of God, lest you should be cut off before you are prepared.

(2.) Consider again what Jesus the Son of God has done and suffered, and consider what he is yet doing towards the preparation of souls for heaven: he came down to our world to undertake the glorious and dreadful work of the redemption of sinners from the curse of the law and the terrors of hell, and to procure a heaven for every rebellious creature that would return to God his Father. Think of the agonies of his death with which he purchased mansions of glory for those that receive his grace in his own appointed methods, those that are willing to have their hearts and minds formed into a suitable frame to receive this felicity. Remember that he is risen from the dead, he is ascended to prepare a place in glory for those that are willing to follow him through the paths of holiness. Hearken to the many kind invitations and allurements of his gospel, which calls to the worst of sinners to return and live, and entreats and exhorts those who are in the ends of the earth, and upon the borders of hell, "to look unto him that they may be saved," Isa. xlv. 22. Take heed that you suffer not these seasons of his inviting love to slide away and vanish unimproved; take heed how you rebel against the language of the grace of

his gospel, and thereby prepare yourselves for double and everlasting destruction.

(3.) Think again, what blessed assistances he has proposed to those who are desirous to be trained up for heaven; how many thousand souls, as carnal, as sensual, and as criminal as yours are, have been recovered by the word of his gospel, and the influences of his Spirit, to a new nature and life of holiness? How many are there who from children of wrath, have become the sons and daughters of the Most High God, heirs of this blessedness, and prepared for the enjoyment of it? O take heed that you resist not his grace, nor rebel against the kind and sacred motions of the blessed Spirit within you, when his very office and business is to change your sinful natures, and to prepare you for the regions of eternal holiness and peace.

(4.) Think yet further what advantages you have had from the weekly ministrations of the word of grace, from reading the book of God in your own language, and from the pious education many of you have enjoyed in the families from whence you sprung. Think what awakening hints you have received by the inward conviction of your own consciences, and by the Christian friends you may have conversed with: have you not been told plainly enough by the voice of conscience, that you are now utterly unprepared for heaven? Have not public and private admonitions given you sufficient warning of the danger of your present state? And after all this will you proceed in your sinful course till you arrive at the very gates of hell and destruction, till you have prepared yourselves, and made your souls ripe for the vengeance of God, and are plunged into it by death without remedy or relief?

(5.) Consider how dreadful will your state be if death meet you in all your guilt and defilements, unwashed, unpardoned, and unsanctified, without

any garment of righteousness, without any robe of salvation. What a terrible sentence is that which death will pronounce upon every such sinner the moment that he strikes their heart? Hear it, and tremble, O miserable creature, hear the formidable and eternal sentence, Let him that is unholy be unholy still: let him that is unprepared for heaven go down to the regions of death and hell, for which his iniquities have best prepared him.

(6.) Think with yourselves, if you have any thing of importance to do in this world, or have any momentous scene of life to pass through, how diligent are you in preparation for it. If you are but to visit the court of a prince, or go to make your addresses to any great man of honour and power, or to be admitted into any numerous society of a superior character, how diligently do you endeavour to furnish yourselves with such knowledge of the common ceremonies of life, and such ornaments about your body as may render you acceptable amongst those whom you are going to converse with: and does not an entrance into the court of heaven, into the presence of a God of holiness, and into the society of pure and blessed spirits require some solicitude and care about those ornaments and qualifications which are necessary for so solemn and glorious an appearance? If you are designing in this life to commence any trade or business for your employment and your support, you are willing to serve an apprenticeship of seven years in order to a preparation for the exercise of this public business; and can you not afford one day in a week to learn the business of heaven, and to prepare for the blessedness of it?

And let parents also consider with themselves what pains they have taken that their children may be fit for the trades and employments of life to which they design them, and then let each inquire

of their own consciences, Have I ever done so much to train up my son for the heavenly world, to fit him for the appearance before God, and saints and angels, and for all the unknown services of that celestial country?

(7.) Go on yet farther, O impenitent sinners, and consider with yourselves what a blessedness it is to be prepared for heaven; for then you are prepared for death, and at once you take away all the terrors of it. O what an unspeakable happiness is it to pass through this world daily without the fear of dying? What is it that makes life so bitter to multitudes of souls, and every malady or accident so frightful to them, but the perpetual terrors of death? Think what a divine satisfaction it is to walk up and down in this desert land, ready prepared for an entrance into the land of promise, the inheritance of the saints in light: think of the solid joy and inward consolation of those souls who feel in themselves an habitual readiness for a departure hence, and who are wrought up by divine grace to a preparation for the business and the joys above. Think of the victory over death, which is obtained by such a readiness for heaven, and how glorious a thing it is to meet that last enemy the king of terrors, and encounter him without fear, and to triumph over him with divine language, O death, where is thy sting? How joyful a scene would it be to take leave of all our friends in this land of mortality, with an assured hope that we are entering into a happier climate and a better country, ready prepared for all the more glorious scenes that shall meet us in the invisible world.

It is an amazing thing to me how the children of men, who are dying daily from off this stage of life, who must all shortly die, and enter into the world of eternal futurity, should be no more concerned about a preparation for their departure hence: that they should be so stupidly thoughtless of a world to come,

while they are on the very borders of it, and eternal joy or eternal sorrow depends upon this one question, Am I prepared for heaven or not? O those two awful regions of the unseen world! where the love of God shines with its brightest glories, or where the vengeance of God is discovered in all its anguish and horror! One of these will be the certain and eternal dwelling-place of the souls that are prepared for them, and there must they pass their long immortality, either in joy, or in sorrow, without a change; and yet the foolish and besotted tribes of mankind seem to have abandoned all thought and concern about them. A dangerous lethargy, or distraction!

What shall we do to cure sinners of this madness? Shall I try to rouse these indolent unthinking wretches out of their dangerous and mortal slumbers with the loudest voice of thunder and divine terror? But the lethargy of sin is proof against all these terrors and thunders. Shall I call for a fountain of tears into my eyes, and weep over them with the tenderest sympathy and compassion? But they feel not any meltings of pity for themselves, nor are their hearts to be softened by all our fears and wailings. Shall I beseech them in the name of Christ, by the bowels of his dying love, and the blood and anguish of his sufferings for our salvation? But even these divine and astonishing instances of tenderness and mercy make no impression on their souls. While Satan holds them in his chains, they are sleeping the sleep of death. O for a word of sovereign and almighty grace to reach the centre of their spirits! To shake all the powers of their nature! To awaken them to behold their eternal interest! and to prepare for heavenly felicity. Awake, O sleepers, ere the angel of death seize you, and the grave shut its mouth upon you; then all your seasons and hopes of mercy are cut off for ever, and you will awake hopeless immortals.

I shall conclude this discourse with one word of

exhortation to those who are in any measure wrought up to a preparation for the heavenly blessedness. O happy creatures! whatsoever pains you have taken, whatever conflicts you have endured in the matter of your own salvation, yet let God and his grace have all the honour of this work. It is to God you owe your sacrifices of praise. He that hath wrought you up for this felicity is God. It was he who awakened you first, and set you a thinking of your most important concerns: it was he that led you first into the way of salvation by Jesus Christ his Son, and hath thus far crowned your labours and your prayers with success and blessing. Every stumbling-block in your way might have thrown you down to perdition: every temptation might have turned you back from this glorious pursuit: every enemy of your souls might have discouraged or overcome, if God and his grace had not been engaged on your side.

It is he hath upheld you when you were falling, he hath taken you by the hand and led you right onward when you were wandering, and he hath supported you by his divine cordials of promise when you were fainting. It is God who hath enabled you to maintain your conflict with all the mighty obstacles of your faith and hope; it is his grace hath renewed your nature, hath weaned you from this vain flattering world, and given you a sacred relish of divine blessedness. It is he who hath formed you again after his own image, and hath trained you up, and made you meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Call up all your powers to praise his goodness, and say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name: bless the Lord for ever, and forget not all his benefits. It is God who hath called me out of darkness into his marvellous light, and given me to see the things that belong to my everlasting peace. It is God who washed away my iniquities in the blood of his own

Son, and hath renewed me to holiness by his blessed Spirit. It is God who hath taken me out of the family of sin and Satan, and given me a place among his children; who hath begun to prepare me for the joys and blessings of heaven, and in his own time he will fulfil all my hopes, and complete my felicity." Walk before him with all holy care and watchfulness, and take heed that you lose not the things which you have wrought, nor the things which God has wrought in you, but that persevering to the end you may receive the full reward, and obtain the crown of everlasting life. Amen.

DISCOURSE IX.

NO PAIN AMONG THE BLESSED.

Rev. xxi. 4.

Neither shall there be any more pain.

There have been some divines in ancient times, as well as in our present age, who suppose this prophecy relates to some glorious and happy event here on earth, wherein the saints and faithful followers of Christ shall be delivered from the bondage and miseries to which they have been exposed in all former ages, and shall enjoy the blessing which these words promise. Among these writers some have placed this happy state before the resurrection of the body; others make it to belong to that first resurrection which is spoken of in Rev. xx. 6. But let this prophecy have a particular aspect upon what earthly period soever, yet all must grant it is certainly true concerning the heavenly state; from whose felicities, taken in the literal sense, these figurative expressions are derived to foretell the happiness of any period of the church in this world; and in this sense, as part of our happiness in heaven, I shall understand the words here, and propose them as the foundation for my present discourse.

Among the many things that make this life uncomfortable, and render mankind unhappy here below, this is one that has a large influence, viz. that in this mortal state we are all liable to pain, from which we shall be perfectly delivered in the life to come. The Greek word which is here translated pain, signifies also toil and fatigue, and excessive labour of the body, as well as anguish and vexation of the spirit: but since in the two other places of the New Testament where it is used, the word most properly signifies the pain of the body, I presume to understand it chiefly in this sense also in my text.

I need not spend time in explaining what pain is to persons who dwell in flesh and blood: there is not one of you in this assembly but is better acquainted with the nature of it by the sense of feeling, than it is possible for the wisest philosopher to inform you by all his learned language. Yet that I may proceed regularly, I would just give you this short description of it. Pain is an uneasy perception of the soul, occasioned by some indisposition of the body to which it is united; whether this arise from some disorder or malady in the flesh itself, or from some injury received from without by wounds, bruises, or any thing of the like kind. Now this sort of uneasy sensations is not to be found or feared in heaven.

In order to make our present meditations on this part of the blessedness of heaven useful and joyful to us while we are here on earth, let us inquire,

I. What are the evils or grand inconveniences that generally flow from the pains we suffer here; and as we go we shall survey the satisfactions which arise by our freedom from them all in heaven.

II. What just and convincing proofs may be given that there are no such uneasy sensations to be felt in heaven, or to be feared after this life.

III. What are the chief reasons or designs of the blessed God in sending pain on his creatures in this world; and at the same time I shall show that pain is banished from the heavenly state, because God has no such designs remaining to be accomplished in that world.

IV. What lessons we may learn from the painful discipline which we feel while we are here, in order to show there is no need of such discipline to teach us those lessons in heaven. Let us address ourselves to make these four inquiries in their order.

SECTION I.

First. What are the evils which flow from pain, and usually attend it in this life; and all along as we go we shall take a short view of the heavenly state, where we shall be released from all these evils, and inconveniences.

1. Pain has a natural tendency to make the mind sorrowful as well as the body uneasy. Our souls are so nearly united to flesh and blood, that it is not possible for the mind to possess perfect happiness and ease, while the body is exposed to so many occasions of pain. It is granted, that natural courage and strength of heart may prevail in some persons to bear up their spirits under long and intense pains of the flesh, yet they really take away so much of the ease and pleasure of life, while any of us lie under the acute sensations of them. Pain will make us confess that we are flesh and blood, and force us sometimes to cry out and groan. Even a stoic, in spite of all the pride of his philosophy, will sometimes be forced, by a sigh or groan, to confess himself a man. What are the greatest part of the groans and outcries that are heard all around this our globe of earth but the effects of pain, either felt or feared?

But in heaven, where there is no pain, there shall be no sighing or groaning, nor any more crying, as my text expresses. There shall be nothing to make the flesh or the spirit uneasy, and to break the eternal thread of peace and pleasure that runs through the whole duration of the saints: not one painful moment to interrupt the everlasting felicity of that state. When we have done with earth and mortality, we have done also with sickness and anguish of nature, and with all sorrow and vexation for ever. There are no groans in the heavenly world to break in upon the harmony of the harps and the songs of the blessed; no sighs, no outcries, no anguish there to disturb the music and the joy of the inhabitants. And though the soul shall be united to the body new-raised from the dead, to dwell for ever in union, yet that new-raised body shall have neither any springs of pain in it, nor be capable of giving anguish or uneasiness to the indwelling spirit for ever.

2. Another evil which attends on pain is this, that it so indisposes our nature, as often to unfit us for the businesses and duties of the present state. With how much coldness and indifference do we go about our daily work, and perform it too with many interruptions, when nature is burdened with continual pain, and the vital springs of action are overborne with perpetual uneasiness? What a listlessness do we find to many of the duties of religion at such a season, unless it be to run more frequently to the throne of God, and pour out our groanings and our complaints there? Groanings and cries are the language of nature, and the children of God address themselves in this language to their heavenly Father: Blessed be the name of our gracious God, who hears every secret sigh, who is acquainted with the sense of every groan, while we mourn before him, and make our complaints to him, that we cannot worship him, nor

work for him as we would do, because of the anguish and maladies of nature.

And what an indisposition and backwardness do we feel in ourselves to fulfil many of the duties towards our fellow-creatures while we ourselves are under present smart and anguish? Pain will so sensibly affect self, as to draw off all our thoughts thither, and centre them there, that we cannot so much employ our cares and our active powers for the benefit of our neighbours: it abates our concern for our friends, and while it awakens the spirit within us to keen sensations, it takes away the activity of the man that feels it from almost all the services of human life. When human nature bears so much, it can act but little.

But what a blessed state will that be when we shall never feel this indisposition to duties, either human or divine, through any uneasiness of the body? When we shall never more be subject to any of these painful impediments, but for ever cast off all those clogs and burdens which fetter the active powers of the soul? Then we shall be joyfully employed in such unknown and glorious services to God our Father, and to the blessed Jesus, as require much superior capacities to what we here possess, and shall find no weakness, no weariness, no pain throughout all the years of our immortality, Rev. vii. 15. None of the blessed above are at rest or idle, either day or night, but they serve him in his temple, and never cease, chap. iv. 8. No faintness, no languors are known there. The inhabitants of that land "shall not say, I am sick:" everlasting vigour, cheerfulness and ease shall render every blessed soul for ever zealous and active in obedience, as the angels are in heaven.

3. Pain unfits us for the enjoyments of life, as well as for the labours and duties of it. It takes away all the pleasing satisfactions which might

attend our circumstances, and renders the objects of them insipid and unrelishing. What pleasure can a rich man take in all the affluence of earthly blessings around him, while some painful distemper holds him upon the rack, and distresses him with the torture? How little delight can he find in meats or in drinks which are prepared for luxury, when sharp pain calls all his attention to the diseased part? What joy can he find in magnificent buildings, in gay and shining furniture, in elegant gardens, or in all the glittering treasures of the Indies, when the gout torments his hands and his feet, or the rheumatism afflicts his limbs with intense anguish? If pain attacks any part of the body, and rises to a high degree, the luxuries of life grow tasteless, and life itself is imbittered to us; or when pains less acute are prolonged through weeks and months, and perhaps stick in our flesh all the night as well as in the day, how vain and feeble are all the efforts of the bright and gay things around us to raise the soul into cheerfulness! Therefore Solomon calls old age the years "wherein there is no pleasure," Eccles. xii. 1. Because so many aches and ails in that season pursue us in a continual succession; so many infirmities and painful hours attend us usually in that stage of life, even in the best situation that mortality can boast of, as cuts off and destroys all our pleasures.

But O what a wondrous, what a joyful change shall that be, when the soul is commanded to forsake this flesh and blood, when it rises as on the wings of angels to the heavenly world, and leaves every pain behind it, together with the body, in the arms of death? and what a more illustrious and delightful change shall we meet in the great rising-day when our bodies shall start up out of the dust with vigorous immortality, and without any spring or seat of pain! All the unknown enjoyments with which heaven is

furnished shall be taken in by the enlarged powers of the soul with intense pleasure, and not a moment's pain shall ever interrupt them.

4. Another inconvenience and evil which belongs to pain is, that it makes time and life itself appear tedious and tiresome, and adds a new burden to all other grievances. Many evidences of this truth are scattered throughout all nature, and on all sides of this globe. There is not one age of mankind but can furnish us with millions of instances. In what melancholy language does Job discover his sensations of the tiresome nature of pain? "I am made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me: When I lie down I say, When shall I rise and the night be gone? And I am full of tossing to and fro unto the dawning of the day," Job vii. 3. When pain takes hold of our flesh, it seems to stretch the measures of time to a tedious length: we cry out, as Moses expresses it, Deut. xxviii. 67: "In the morning we say, Would to God it were evening; and at the return of the evening we say again, Would to God it were morning."

Long are those hours indeed, whether of day-light or darkness, wherein there is no relief or intermission of acute pain. How tiresome a thing is it to count the clock at midnight in long successions, and to wait every hour for the distant approach of morning, while our eyes are unable to close themselves in slumber, and our anguish admits not the common refuge of sleep. There are multitudes among the race of mortals who have known these truths by sore experience. Blessed be God that we do not always feel them!

But when we turn our thoughts to the heavenly world, where there is no pain, there we shall find no weary hours, no tedious days, though eternity with all its unmeasurable lengths of duration lies before

us. What a dismal thought is eternal pain? The very mention of it makes nature shudder and stand aghast; but futurity with all its endless years, in a land of peace and pleasure, gives the soul the most delightful prospect; for there is no shadow of uneasiness in that state to render our abode there tiresome, or to think the ages of it long.

5. Another evil that belongs to pain is, that it has an unhappy tendency to ruffle the passions, and to render us fretful and peevish within ourselves, as well as towards those who are round about us. Even the kindest and the tenderest hand that ministers to our relief, can hardly secure itself from the peevish quarrels of a man in extreme pain.

Not that we are to suppose that this peevish humour, this fretfulness of spirit, are thereby made innocent and perfectly excused: no, by no means; but it must be acknowledged still that continuance in pain is too ready to work up the spirit into frequent disquietude and eagerness: we are tempted to fret at every thing, we quarrel with every thing, we grow impatient under every delay, angry with our best friends, sharp and sudden in our resentments, with wrathful speeches breaking out of our lips.

This peevish humour in a day of pain is so common a fault, that I fear it is too much excused and indulged. Let me rather say with myself, "My God is now putting me to the trial what sort of Christian I am, and how much I have learned of self-government, and through his grace I will subdue my uneasy passions, though I cannot relieve my pain." O it is a noble point of honour gained in a sick chamber, or on a bed of anguish, to lie pressed with extreme pain, and yet maintain a serenity and calmness of soul; to be all meekness and gentleness and patience among our friends or attendants, under the sharp twinges of it; to utter no rude or angry language, and to take every thing kindly that they say

or do, and become like a weaned child. But such a character is not found in every house.

A holy soul, through the severity of pain, may sometimes in such an hour be too much ruffled by violent and sudden fits of impatience. This proceeded to such a degree even in that good man Job, under his various calamities and the sore boils upon his flesh, that made him curse the day wherein he was born, and cry out in the anguish of his spirit, "My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than life." Job iii. and vii. 15. And there have been several instances of those who, having not the fear of God before their eyes, with hasty violence and murderous hands have put an end to their own lives, through their wild and sinful impatience of constant pain.

But these trials are for ever finished when this life expires: then all our pains are ended for ever, if we are found among the children of God. There is not, nor can be any temptation in heaven, to fretfulness or disquietude of mind: all the peevish passions are dropped into the grave, together with the body of flesh; and those evil humours, which were the source of smart and anguish here on earth, have no place in the new-raised body: those irregular juices of animal nature, which tormented the nerves, and excited pain in the flesh, and which at the same time provoked choler and irritated the spirit, are never found in the heavenly mansions. There is nothing but peace and pleasure, joy and love, goodness and benevolence, ease and satisfaction diffused through all the regions on high: there are no inward springs of uneasiness to ruffle the mind, none of those fretful ferments which were wont to kindle in the mortal body, and explode themselves with fire and thunder upon every supposed offence, or even sometimes without provocation. O happy state and blessed mansions of the saints, when this body of sin shall be destroyed, and all the restless atoms that disquieted

the flesh and provoked the spirit of impatience shall be buried in the dust of death, and never, never rise again!

6. Pain carries a temptation with it, sometimes, to repine and murmur at the providence of God. Not fellow-creatures alone, but even our sovereign Creator comes within the reach of the peevish humours, which are alarmed and roused by sharp or continual pain. Jonah the prophet, when he felt the sultry heat of the sun smite fiercely upon him, and the gourd which gave him a friendly shadow was withered away, he told God himself in a passion, that "he did well to be angry, even unto death." Jonah iv. 9. And even the man of Uz, the pattern of patience, was sometimes transported with the smart and maladies that were upon him, so that he complained against God as well as complained to him, and used some very unbecoming expressions towards his Maker. When we are under the smarting rebukes of Providence, we are ready to compare ourselves with others who are in peace, and then the envious and the murmuring humour breaks out into rebellious language, Why am I thus afflicted more than others? Why hast thou set me as a mark for thine arrows? Why dost thou not let loose thy hand and cut me off from the earth?

But in heaven there is a glorious reverse of all such unhappy scenes: there is no pain nor any temptation to murmur at the dealings of the Almighty: there is nothing that can incline us to think hardly of God: the days of chastisement are for ever ended, and painful discipline shall be used no more. We shall live for ever in the embraces of the love of God, and he shall be the object of our everlasting praise. Perfect felicity without the interruption of one uneasy thought for ever forbids the inhabitants of that world to repine at their situation under the eternal smiles of that blessed Being that made them.

7. To add no more, pain and anguish of the flesh

have sometimes prevailed so far as to distract the mind as well as destroy the body. It has overpowered all the reasoning faculties of man, it has destroyed natural life, and brought it down to the grave: the senses have been confounded, and the understanding overwhelmed with severe and racking pain, especially where there hath been an impatient temper to contest with them. Extreme smart of the flesh distresses feeble nature, and turns the whole frame of it upside down in wild confusion: it has actually worn out this animal frame, and stopped all the springs of vital motion. The gout and the stone have brought death upon the patient in this manner; and a dreadful manner of dying it is, to have breath, and life, and nature, quite oppressed and destroyed with intense and painful sensations.

But when we survey the mansions of the heavenly world, we shall find none of these evils there: no danger of any such events as these; for there is no pain, no sorrow, no crying, no death nor destruction there. The mind shall be for ever clear and serene in the ease and happiness of the separate state; and when the body shall be raised again, that glorified body, as was intimated a little before, shall have none of the seeds of distemper in it; no ferments that can rack the nerves, or create anguish; no fever, or gout, or stone, was ever known in that country, no head-ach or heart-ach have ascended thither.

That body also shall be capable of no outward wounds nor bruises, for it is raised only for happiness, and leaves all the causes of pain behind it. It is a body made for immortality and pleasure; there the sickly Christian is delivered from all the maladies of the flesh, and the twinges of acute pain which made him groan here on earth night and day. There the martyrs of the religion of Jesus, and all the holy confessors are free from their cruel tormentors, those surly executioners of heathen fury, or antichristian

wrath; they are for ever released from racks, and wheels, and fires, and every engine of torture and smart. Immortal ease and unfading health and cheerfulness run through their eternal state, and all the powers of the man are composed for the most regular exercises of devotion and divine joy.

Thus I have endeavoured briefly to set the different states of heaven and earth before you under this distinguishing character, that all the tempting, the distressing and mischievous attendants and consequences of pain, to which we are exposed in our mortal life, are for ever banished from the heavenly world.

SECTION II.

The second general inquiry was this: What just and convincing arguments or proofs can be given, that there are no pains or uneasy sensations to be felt by the saints in a future state, nor to be feared after this life?

My answers to this question shall be very few; because I think the thing must be sufficiently evident to those who believe the New Testament, and have liberty to read it.

First argument. God has assured us so in his word, that there is no pain for holy souls to endure in the world to come? My text may be esteemed a sufficient proof of it; for whatsoever particular event or period of the church on earth this prophecy may refer to, yet the description is borrowed from the blessedness of heaven; and if there shall be any such state on earth, much more will it be so in the heavenly world, whereof that period on earth is but a shadow and emblem. We are expressly told, Rev. xiv. 8, in order to encourage the persecuted saints and martyrs, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth, for they rest from their labours (or pains) and their works follow them;" that is, in a way of gracious recompense.

It is granted indeed by the papists themselves, that in heaven there is no pain; yet they suppose there are many and grievous pains for the soul to undergo in a place called purgatory, after the death of the body, before it arrives at heaven.

But give me leave to ask, does not St. Paul express himself with confidence concerning himself and his fellow Christians—that they shall be present with the Lord when they are absent from the body? 2 Cor. v. 8. Surely the state wherein Christ our Lord dwells after all his sufferings and agonies, is a state of everlasting ease without suffering; and shall not his followers dwell with him? Do we not read in the parable of our Saviour, Luke xvi. 22, that Lazarus was no sooner dead, but his soul was carried by angels into the bosom of Abraham, or paradise? Every holy soul wherein the work of grace is begun, and sin hath received its mortal wound, is perfectly sanctified when it is released from this body: and it puts off the body of sin and the body of flesh together, for nothing that defileth must enter into paradise, or the heavenly state.

The word of God has appointed but two states, viz. heaven and hell, for the reception of all mankind when they depart from this world; and how vain a thing must it be for men to invent a third state, and make a purgatory of it! This is a building erected by the church of Rome between heaven and hell, and prepared, by their wild imagination, for souls of imperfect virtue, to be tormented there with pains equal to those of hell, but of shorter duration. This state of fiery purgation, and extreme anguish, is devised by that mother of lies, partly under a pretence of completing the penances and satisfactions for the sins of men committed in this life, and partly also to purify and refine their souls from all the remaining dregs of sin, and fill up their virtues to perfection, that they may be fit for the immediate presence of

God. But does not the scripture sufficiently inform us, that the atonement or satisfaction of Christ for sin is full and complete in itself, and needs none of our additions in this world or another? Does not the apostle John tell us, 1 John i. 7, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin?" Nor shall the saints after this life sin any more, to require any new atonement; nor do they carry the seeds of sin to heaven with them, but drop them together with the flesh, and all the sources of pain together; now since neither Christ nor his apostles give us any intimation of such a place as purgatory for the refinement or purification of souls after this life, we have no ground to hearken to such a fable.

The second argument is this: God has not provided any medium to convey pain to holy souls after they have dropped this body of flesh. They are pardoned, they are sanctified, they are accepted of God for ever; and since they are in no danger of sinning afresh by the influences of corrupt flesh and blood, therefore they are in no fear of suffering any thing thereby. And if, as some divines have supposed, there should be any pure ethereal bodies or vehicles provided for holy separate souls, when departed from this grosser tabernacle of flesh and blood, yet it cannot be supposed that the God of all grace would mix up any seeds of pain with that ethereal matter, which is to be the occasional habitation of sanctified spirits in that state, nor that he would make any avenues or doors of entrance for pain, into these refined vehicles, when the state of their sinning and their trials is for ever finished.

Nor will the body at the final resurrection of the saints be made for a medium of any painful sensations. All the pains of nature are ended, when the first union between flesh and spirit is dissolved. When this body lies down to sleep in the dust, it shall never awake again with any of the principles of sin or pain

in it; though it be "sown in weakness, it is raised in power;" though it be "sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory;" and we shall be made like the Son of God, without sorrow and without sin for ever.

Third argument. There are no moral causes or reasons why there should be any thing of pain provided for the heavenly state. And if there be no moral reasons for it, surely God will not provide pain for his creatures without reason! But this thought leads me to the next general [division] of my discourse.

SECTION III.

The third general inquiry which I proposed to make was this: What may be the chief moral reasons, motives, or designs of the blessed God in sending pain on his creatures here below? And at the same time I shall show that these designs and purposes of God are finished, and they have no place in heaven.

First, then, pain is sometimes sent into our natures to awaken slothful and drowsy Christians out of their spiritual slumbers, or to rouse stupid sinners from a state of spiritual death. Intense and sharp pain of the flesh has oftentimes been the appointed and effectual means of Providence to attain these desirable ends.

Pain is like a rod in the hand of God, wherewith he smites sinners that are dead in their trespasses, and his Spirit joins with it to awaken them into spiritual life. This rod is sometimes so smarting and severe, that it will make a senseless and ungodly wretch look upwards to the hand that smites it, and take notice of the rebuke of Heaven, though all the thundering and lightning of the word, and all the terrors of hell denounced there, could not awaken them.

Acute pain is also a common instrument in our heavenly Father's hand, to recover backsliding saints from their secure and drowsy frames of spirit.

David often found it so, and speaks it plainly in the 38th and 39th Psalms; and in Psalm cxix. 67, he confesses, "Before I was afflicted I went astray;" but when he had felt the scourge, he learned to obey, and to keep the word of his God.

But there is no need of this discipline in heaven; no need of this smarting scourge to make dead sinners feel their Maker's hand, in order to rouse them into life, for there are no such inhabitants in that world: nor is there any need of such divine and paternal discipline of God in those holy mansions, where there is no drowsy Christian to be awakened, no wandering spirit that wants to be reduced to duty; and where the designs of such smarting strokes have no place, pain itself must be for ever banished; for God does not willingly, afflict nor take delight in grieving the children of men without substantial reasons for it.

2. Another use of bodily pain and anguish in this world is, to punish men for their faults and follies, to make them know what an evil and bitter thing it is to sin against God, and thereby to guard them against new temptations, Jer. ii. 19: "Thy own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee;" that is, by means of the smarting chastisements they bring upon men. When God makes the sinner taste of the fruit of his own ways, he makes others also observe how hateful a thing every sin is in the sight of God, which he thinks fit so terribly to punish.

This is one general reason why special diseases, maladies and plagues are spread over a whole nation, viz. to punish the sins of the inhabitants, when they have provoked God by public and spreading iniquities. War and famine, with all their terrible train of anguish and agony, and the dying pains which they diffuse over a kingdom, are rods of punishment in the hand of God, the governor of the

world, to declare from heaven and earth his indignation against an ungodly and an unrighteous age.

This indeed is one design of the pains and torments of hell where God inflicts pain without intermission; and this is sometimes the purpose of God in his painful providences here on earth: shall I rise yet higher, and say, that this was one great design in the eye of God, when it pleased the Father to bruise his best beloved Son, and put him under the impressions of extreme pain, viz. to discover to the world the abominable evil that was in sin? While Jesus stood in the stead of sinners, then his soul was exceeding sorrowful even to death; and he sweat drops of blood under the pressure of his agonies, to let the world see what the sin of man had deserved: and sometimes God smites his own children in this world with smarting strokes of correction, when they have indulged any iniquity, to show the world that God hates sin in his own people wheresover he finds it, and to bring his children back again to the paths of righteousness.

But in the heavenly state there are no faults to punish, no follies to chastise. Jesus, our surety, in the days of his flesh has suffered those sorrows which made atonement for sin, and that anguish of his holy soul, and the blood of his cross have satisfied the demands of God: so that with honour he can pardon ten thousand penitent criminals, and provide an inheritance of ease and blessedness for them for ever. When once we are dismissed from this body, the spirit is thoroughly sanctified, and there is no fire of purgatory needful to burn out the remains of sin; those foolish invented flames are but false fire, kindled by the priests of Rome to fright the souls of the dying, and to squeeze money out of them to purchase so many vain and idle masses to relieve the souls of the dead. Upon our actual release from this flesh and blood, neither the guilt nor the power of sin shall attend the saints in their flight to heaven; all the spirits

that arrive there are made perfect in holiness without new scourges, and commence a state of felicity that shall never be interrupted.

3. God has appointed pain in this world, to exercise and try the virtues and the graces of his people. As gold is thrown into the fire to prove and try how pure it is from any coarse alloy, so the children of God are sometimes left for a season in the furnace of sufferings, partly to refine them from their dross, and partly to discover their purity and their substantial weight and worth.

Sometimes God lays smarting pain with his own hand on the flesh of his people, on purpose to try their graces; when we endure the pain without murmuring at Providence, then it is we come off conquerors. Christian submission and silence under the hand of God, is one way to victory. "I was dumb," says David, "and opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." Psal. xxxix. 9: Our love to God, our resignation to his will, our holy fortitude and our patience find a proper trial in such smarting seasons. Perhaps when some severe pain first seizes and surprises us, we find ourselves like a wild bull in a net, and all the powers of nature are thrown into tumult and disquietude, so that we have no possession of our own spirits; but when the hand of God has continued us a while under this divine discipline, we learn to bow down to his sovereignty, we lie at his footstool calm and composed; he brings our haughty and reluctant spirits down to his foot, and makes us lie humble in the dust, and we wait with patience the hour of his release. Rom. v. 3, 4. Tribulation worketh patience, and patience under tribulation gives us experience of the dealings of God with his people, and makes our way to a confirmed hope in his love. The evidence of our various graces grows brighter and stronger under a smarting rod, till we are settled in a joyful confidence, and the soul rests in God himself.

Sometimes he has permitted evil angels to put the flesh to pain, for the trial of his children; so Job was smitten with sore boils from head to foot by the malice of Satan, at the permission of God: "But he knows the way that I take," says this holy man, and "when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps" through all these trials; "neither have I gone back from the commandments of his lips," Job xxiii. 10, 12.

At other times he suffers wicked men to spend their own malice, and to inflict dreadful pains on his own children. Look back to the years of ancient persecution in the land of Israel, under Jewish or heathen tyrants; review the annals of Great Britain; look over the seas into popish kingdoms; take a view of the cursed courts of inquisition in Spain, Portugal, and Italy; behold the weapons, the scourges, the racks, the machines of torture and engines of cruelty devised by the barbarous and inhuman wit of men, to constrain the saints to renounce their faith, and dishonour their Saviour. See the slow fires where the martyrs have been roasted to death with lingering torment: these are the seasons of terrible trial indeed, whereby the malice of Satan and Antichrist would force the servants of God, and the followers of the Lamb, into sinful compliances with their idolatry, or a desertion of their post of duty: but the Spirit of God has supported his children to bear a glorious testimony to pure and undefiled religion; and they have seemed to mock the rage of their tormentors, to defy all the stings of pain, and triumphed over all their vain attempts, to compel them to sin against their God.

One would sometimes be ready to wonder, that a God of infinite mercy and compassion should suffer his own dear children to be tried in so terrible a manner as this; but unsearchable wisdom is with him, and he does not give an account to men of all the rea-

sons and the rules of his conduct. This has been his method of providence with his saints at especial seasons, under the Jewish and the Christian dispensations, and perhaps under all the dispensations of God to men, from the days of Cain and Abel to the present hour. Our blessed Lord has given us many warnings of it in his word by his own mouth, and by all his three apostles, Paul, Peter, and John: "They that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution; think it not strange therefore concerning the fiery trial;" "the devil," by his wicked agents, "shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days, but fear none of these things which thou shalt suffer. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

But blessed be God that this world is the only stage of such trials. As soon as the state of probation is finished, the state of recompense begins. Such hard and painful exercises to try the virtues of the saints, have no place in that world which was not made for a stage of trial and conflict, but a palace of glorious reward. Heaven is the place where crowns and prizes are distributed to all those blessed ones who have endured temptation, and who have been found faithful to the death. These sharp and dreadful combats with pain, have no place among conquerors, who have finished their warfare, and have begun their triumph.

Pain is sent us by the hand of Providence to teach us many a lesson both of truth and duty, which perhaps we should never have learnt so well without it. This sharp sensation awakens our best powers to attend to those truths and duties which we took less notice of before: in the time of perfect ease we are ready to let them lie neglected or forgotten, till God our great master takes his rod in hand for our instruction.

SECTION IV.

And this leads me to the fourth general head of my discourse, and that is, to inquire what are those spiritual lessons which may be learnt on earth from the pains we have suffered, or may suffer in the flesh. I shall divide them into two sorts, namely, lessons of instruction in useful truth, and lessons of duty, or practical Christianity; and there are many of each kind with which the disciples of Christ in this world may be better acquainted, by the actual sensations of pain, than any other way: in this world I say, and in this only; for in heaven most of these lessons of doctrine and practice are utterly needless to be taught, either because they have been so perfectly well known to all its inhabitants before, and their present situation makes it impossible to forget them; or they shall be let into the fuller knowledge of them in heaven in a far superior way of instruction, and without any such uneasy discipline. And this I shall evidently make appear, when I have first enumerated all these general lessons both of truth and duty, and shown how wisely the great God has appointed them to be taught here on earth, under the scourge and the wholesome discipline of pain in the flesh.

I. The lessons of instruction here on earth, or the useful truths, are such as these:

1. Pain teaches us feelingly what feeble creatures we are, and how entirely dependent on God our Maker for every hour and moment of ease. We are naturally wild and wanton creatures, and especially in the season of youth, our gayer powers are gadding abroad at the call of every temptation; but when God sends his arrows into our flesh, he arrests us on a sudden, and teaches us that we are but men, poor, feeble, dying creatures, soon crushed, and sinking under his hand. We are ready to exult in the vi-

gour of youth, when animal nature, in its prime of strength and glory, raises our pride, and supports us in a sort of self-sufficiency, we are so vain and foolish, as to imagine nothing can hurt us. But when the pain of a little nerve seizes us, and we feel the acute twinges of it, we are made to confess that our flesh is not iron, nor our bones brass; that we are by no means the lords of ourselves, or sovereigns over our own nature; we cannot remove the least degree of pain, till the Lord who sent it takes off his hand, and commands the smart to cease. If the torture fix itself but in a finger or a toe, or in the little nerve of a tooth, what intense agonies may it create in us, and that beyond all the relief of medicines, till the moment wherein God shall give us ease. This lesson of the frailty of human nature must be some time written upon our hearts in deep and smarting characters, by intense pain, before we have learnt it well, and this gives us, for time to come, a happy guard against our pride and vanity. Psal. xxxix. 10. When David felt the stroke of the hand of God upon him, and corrected him with sharp rebukes for his iniquity, he makes an humble address to God, and acknowledges that his beauty, and all the boasted excellencies of flesh and blood, consume away like a moth; surely every man is vanity! Psal. xxxix. 10, 11.

2. The next useful truth in which pain instructs us, is the great evil that is contained in the nature of sin, because it is the occasion of such intense pain and misery to human nature. I grant, I have hinted this before, but I would have it more powerfully impressed upon our spirits, and therefore I introduce it here again in this part of my discourse as a spiritual lesson, which we learn under the discipline of our heavenly Father.

It is true indeed that innocent nature was made capable of pain in the first Adam, and the innocent nature of the man Jesus Christ suffered acute pain,

he came in the likeness of sinful flesh; but if Adam had continued in his state of innocence, it is a great question with me, whether he or his children would have actually tasted or felt what acute pain is; I mean such pain as we now suffer, such as makes us so far unhappy, and such as we cannot immediately relieve.

It may be granted, that natural hunger and thirst, and weariness after labour, would have carried in them some degrees of pain or uneasiness, even in the state of innocence; but these are necessary to awaken nature to seek food and rest, and to put the man in mind to supply his natural wants; and man might have immediately relieved them himself, for the supplies of ease were at hand; and these sort of uneasinesses were abundantly compensated by the pleasure of rest and food, and perhaps they were in some measure necessary to make food and rest pleasant.

But surely if sin had never been known in our world, all the pain that arises from inward diseases of nature, or from outward violence, had been a stranger to the human race, an unknown evil among the sons of men, as it is among the holy angels, the sons of God. There had been no distempers or acute pains to meet young babes at their entrance into this world; no maladies to attend the sons and daughters of Adam through the journey of life; and they should have been translated to some higher and happier region, without death, and without pain.

It was the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, that acquainted Adam and his offspring with the evil of pain. Or if pain could have attacked innocence in any form or degree, it would have been but in a way of trial, to exercise and illustrate his virtues; and if he had endured the test, and continued innocent, I am satisfied he should never have felt any pain which was not over-balanced with superior pleasure, or abundantly recompensed by succeeding rewards and satisfactions.

Some persons indeed have supposed it within the reach of the sovereignty of God to afflict and torment a sinless creature: yet I think it is hardly consistent with his goodness, or his equity, to constrain an innocent being, which has no sin, to suffer pain without his own consent, and without giving that creature equal or superior pleasure as a recompense. Both these were the case in the sufferings of our blessed Lord in his human nature, who was perfectly innocent: it was with his own consent that he gave himself up to be a sacrifice, when it pleased the Father to bruise him and put him to grief; and God rewarded him with transcendent honours and joys after his passion; he exalted him to his own right hand and his throne, and gave him authority over all things.

In general, therefore, we have sufficient reason to say, that as sin brought in death into human nature, so it was sin that brought in pain also; and wheresoever there is any pain suffered among the sons and daughters of men, I am sure we may venture to assert boldly, that the sufferer may learn the evil of sin. Even the Son of God himself, when he suffered pain in his body, as well as anguish in his spirit, has told us by his apostles, that our sins were the cause of it: "he bore our sins in his own body on the tree," and "for our iniquities he was bruised:" so says Isaiah the prophet, and so speaks Peter the apostle.

And sometimes the providence of God is pleased to point out to us the particular sin we are guilty of, by the special punishment which he inflicts. In Psalm cvii. 17, 18, fools are said to be afflicted, that is, with pain and sickness, because of their transgressions of riot and intemperance; their soul abhors all manner of meat, and they draw near to the gates of death. Sickness and pain over-balance all the pleasures of luxury in meats and drinks, and make the epicure pay dearly for the elegance of his palate, and the sweet relish of his morsels or his cups. The

drunkard, in his debauches, is preparing some smarting pain for his own punishment. And let us all be so wise as to learn this lesson by the pains we feel, that sin which introduced them into the world, is an abominable thing in the sight of God, because it provokes him to use such smarting strokes of discipline in order to recover us from our folly, and to reduce us back again to the paths of righteousness.

O blessed smart! O happy pain, that helps to soften the heart of a sinner, and melts it to receive divine instruction, which before was hard as iron, and attended to no divine counsel! We are ready to wander from God, and forget him amongst the months and the years of ease and pleasure; but when the soul is melted in this furnace of painful sufferings, it more easily receives some divine stamp, some lasting impression of truth, which the words of the preacher and the book of God had before inculcated without success, and repeated almost in vain. Happy is the soul that learns this lesson thoroughly, and gains a more lasting acquaintance with the evil of sin, and abhorrence of it, under the smarting stroke of the hand of God. Blessed is the man whom thou correctest, O Lord, and teachest him the truths that are written in thy law, Psalm xciv. 12.

3. Pain in the flesh teaches us also how dreadfully the great God can punish sin and sinners when he pleases, in this world or in the other. It is written in the song of Moses, the man of God, Psal. xc. 11, "According to thy fear, so is thy wrath," that is, the displeasure and anger of the blessed God, is as terrible as we can fear it to be; and he can inflict on us such intense pains and agonies, whose distressing smart we may learn by feeling a little of them. Unknown multiplications of racking pain, lengthened out beyond years and ages, is part of the description of hellish torments, and the other part lies in the bitter twinges of conscience and keen remorse of soul for

our past iniquities, but all without hope. Behold a man under a sharp fit of the gout or stone, which wrings the groans from his heart, and tears from his eyelids; this is the hand of God in the present world, where there are many mixtures of divine goodness; but if ever we should be so wilfully unhappy as to be plunged into those regions where the almighty vengeance of God reigns, without one beam of divine light or love, this must be dreadful indeed. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb. x. 31: to be banished far off from all that is holy and happy, and to be confined to that dark dungeon, that place of torture, where the gnawing worm conscience never dies, and where the fire of divine anger is never quenched.

We who are made up of flesh and blood, which is interwoven with many nerves, and muscles, and membranes, may learn a little of the terrors of the Lord, if we reflect that every nerve, muscle, and membrane of the body is capable of giving us most sharp and painful sensations. We may be wounded in every sensible part of nature; smart and anguish may enter in at every pore, and make almost every atom of our constitution an instrument of our anguish. Fearfully and wonderfully are we formed indeed, capable of pain all over us; and if God should see fit to punish sin to its full desert, and penetrate every atom of our nature with pain, what surprising and intolerable misery must that be! And if God should raise the wicked out of their graves to dwell in such sort of bodies again, on purpose to show his just anger against sin in their punishment, how dreadful, beyond expression, must their anguish be through the long ages of eternity! God can form even such bodies for immortality, and can sustain them to endure everlasting agonies.

Let us think again, that when the hand of our Creator sends pain into our flesh, we cannot avoid it, we

cannot fly from it, we carry it with us wheresoever we go; his arrows stick fast in us, and we cannot shake them off; oftentimes it appears that we can find no relief from creatures; and if by the destruction of ourselves, i. e. of these bodies, we plunge ourselves into the world of spirits at once, we shall find the same God of holiness and vengeance there, who can pierce our souls with unknown sorrows, equal, if not superior, to all that we felt in the flesh. If I make my bed in the grave, Lord, thou art there, thy hand of justice and punishment would find me out.

What a formidable thing it is to such creatures as we are, to have God our Maker, for our enemy! that God who has all the tribes of pain and disease, and the innumerable host of maladies at his command! He fills the air in which we breathe with fevers and pestilences as often as he will; the gout and the stone arrest and seize us by his order, and stretch us upon a bed of pain; rheumatisms and colics come and go wheresoever he sends them, and execute his anger against criminals. He keeps in his hand all the various springs of pain, and every invisible rack that can torment the head or members, the bowels or the joints of man; he sets them at their dreadful work when and where he pleases. Let the sinner tremble at the name of his power and terror, who can fill both flesh and spirit with thrilling agonies; and yet he never punishes beyond what our iniquities deserve. How necessary is it for such sinful and guilty beings as we are, whose natures are capable of such constant and acute sensations of pain, to have the God of nature our friend, and our reconciled God?

4. When we feel the acute pain of nature, we may learn something of the exceeding greatness of the love of Christ, even the Son of God, that glorious Spirit, who took upon him flesh and blood for our sakes, that he might be capable of pain and death though he had never sinned. He endured intense

anguish, to make atonement for our crimes. Because the children whom he came to save from misery "were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same, that he might suffer in the flesh," and by his sufferings put away our sins.

Happy was he in his Father's bosom, and the delight of his soul through many long ages before his incarnation; but he condescended to be born in the likeness of sinful flesh, that he might feel such smart and sorrows as our sins had exposed us to. His innocent and holy soul was incapable of such sort of sufferings till he put on this clothing of human nature, and became a surety for sinful perishing creatures.

Let us survey his sufferings a little. He was born to sorrow, and trained up through the common uneasy circumstances of the infant and childish state, till he grew up to man; what pains did attend him in hunger and thirst, and weariness, while he travelled on foot from city to city, through wilds and deserts, where there was no food nor rest! The Son of man sometimes wanted the common bread of nature, nor had he where to lay his head. What uneasy sensations was he exposed to, when he was buffeted, when he was smitten on the cheek, when his tender flesh was scourged with whips, and his temples were crowned with thorns, when his hands and his feet were barbarously torn with rude nails, and fastened to the cross where the whole weight of his body hung on those wounds! And what man or angel can tell the inward anguish, when his soul was exceeding sorrowful unto death, and the conflicts and agonies of his spirit forced out the drops of bloody sweat through every pore. It was by the extreme torture of his nature that he was supposed to expire on the cross; these were the pangs of his atonement and agonies that expiated the sins of men.

O blessed Jesus, what manner of sufferings were these! And what manner of love was it that willingly

gave up thy sacred nature to sustain them! And what was the design of them, but to deliver us from the wrath of God in hell, to save our flesh and spirit from eternal anguish and distress there? Why was he made such a curse for us, but that he might redeem us from the curse of the law, and the just punishment of our own iniquities?

Let us carry our thoughts of his love, and our benefit by it, yet one step further: was it not by these sorrows, and this painful passion, that he provided for us this very heaven of happiness, where we shall be for ever freed from all pain? Were they not all endured by him to procure a paradise of pleasure, a mansion of everlasting peace and joy for guilty creatures, who had merited everlasting pain? Was it not by these his agonies in the mortal body, which he assumed, that he purchased for each of us a glorified body, strong and immortal as his own when he rose from the dead, a body which has no seeds of disease or pain in it, no springs of mortality or death. May glory, honour and praise, with supreme pleasure, ever attend the sacred person of our Redeemer, whose sorrows and anguish of flesh and spirit were equal to our misery, and to his own compassion.

5. Another lesson which we are taught by the long and tiresome pains of nature, is the value and worth of the word of God, and the sweetness of a promise which can give the kindest relief to a painful hour, and sooth the anguish of nature. They teach us the excellency of the covenant of grace, which has sometimes strengthened the feeblest pieces of human nature to bear intense sufferings in the body, and which sanctifies them all to our advantage. Painful and tiresome maladies teach us to improve the purposes, and the promises take away half the smart of our pains by the sensations of divine love let into the soul.

We read of philosophers and heroes in some an-

cient histories, who could endure pain by dint of reasoning, by a pride of their science, by an obstinacy of heart, or by natural courage; but a Christian takes the word of a promise, and lies down upon it in the midst of intense pains of nature; and the pleasure of devotion supplies him with such ease, that all the reasonings of philosophy, all the courage of nature, all the anodynes of medicine, and soothing plasters have attempted without success. When a child of God can read his Father's love in a promise, and by searching into the qualifications of his own soul, can lay faster hold of it, by a living faith, the rage of his pain is much allayed, and made half easy. A promise is a sweet couch to rest a languishing body in the midst of pains, and a soft repose for the head or heart-ache.

The stoics pretended to give ease to pain, by persuading themselves there was no evil in it; as though the mere misnaming of things would destroy their nature; but the Christian, by a sweet submission to the evil which his heavenly Father inflicts upon his flesh, reposes himself at the foot of God on the covenant of grace, and bears the wounds and the smart with much more serenity and honour. It is my heavenly Father that scourges me, and I know he designs me no hurt, though he fills my flesh with present pain, his own presence, and the sense of his love, soften the anguish of all that I feel; he bids me not yield to fear, for when I pass through the fires he will be with me: and he that loved me and died for me, has suffered greater sorrows and more anguish on my account, than what he calls me to bear under the strokes of his wise and holy discipline; he has left his word with me as a universal medicine to relieve me under all my anguish, till he shall bring me to those mansions on high, where sorrows and pains are found no more.

6. Anguish and pain of nature here on earth teach

us the excellency and use of the mercy-seat in heaven, and the admirable privilege of prayer. Even the sons of mere nature are ready to think of God at such a season; and they who never prayed before, pour out a prayer before him when his chastening is upon them, Isaiah xxvi. 16. An hour of twinging and tormenting pain, when creatures and medicines can give no relief, drives them to the throne of God to try whether he will relieve them or no. But much more delightful is it for a child of God that has been used to address the throne of grace, to run thither with pleasure and hope, and to spread all his anguish before the face of his heavenly Father. The blessed God has built this mercy-seat for his people to bring all their sorrows thither, and spread them before his eyes in all their smarting circumstances, and he has been often pleased to speak a word of relief.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, when he dwelt in flesh and blood, practised this part of religion with holy satisfaction and success. Being in an agony he prayed more earnestly, and an angel was sent to strengthen and comfort him, Luke xxii. 43, 44. This was the relief of holy David in ancient times, Psalm xxv. 18: "Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and pardon all my sins." Psal. cxvi. 3, 4: "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell, (or the grave,) took hold of me; then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." And when he found a gracious answer to his request, he acknowledges the grace of God therein, and charges his soul to dwell near to God: "Return to thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee; I was brought low, and he helped me: he delivered my soul from death, and mine eyes from tears."

But we have stronger encouragement than David was acquainted with, since it is revealed to us, that we have a High Priest at this throne ready to bespeak

all necessary relief for us there. Heb. ii. 18: A High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, who has sustained the same sorrows and pains in the flesh, who can pity and relieve his people under their maladies and acutest anguish, Heb. iv. 15. When we groan and sigh under continued pains, they are ready to make nature weary and faint; we groan unto the Lord, who knows the language of our frailty; our High Priest carries every groan to the mercy-seat; his compassion works towards his brethren, and he will suffer them to continue no longer under this discipline, than is necessary for their own best improvement and happiness.

O how much of this sort of consolation has many a Christian learnt and tasted, by a holy intercourse with heaven, in such painful seasons. How much has he learnt of the tender mercies of God the Father, and of the pity and sympathy of our great High Priest above! Who would be content to live in such a painful world as this is, without the pleasure and relief of prayer? Who would live without an interest at this mercy-seat, and without the supporting friendship of this Advocate at the throne?

Thus I have run over the chief lessons of instruction or doctrine, which may be derived from our sensations of pain here in this world; but there is no need of this sort of discipline in the blessed regions of heaven to teach the inhabitants such truths.

They well remember what feeble, helpless creatures they were when they dwelt in flesh and blood: but they have put off those fleshly garments of mortality, with all its weaknesses together. The spirits of the blessed know nothing of those frailties, nor shall the bodies of the saints, new raised from the dust, bring back any of their old infirmities with them. These blessed creatures know well how entirely dependent they are for all things upon God

their Creator, without the need of pains and maladies to teach them, for they live every moment with God, and in a full dependence upon him; they are supported in their life, and all its everlasting blessings, by his immediate presence, power, and mercy.

They have no need of pain in those fields or gardens of pleasure to teach them the evil of sin; they well remember all the sorrows they have passed through in their mortal state, while they were traversing the wilderness of this world, and they know that sin was the cause of them all. They see the evil of sin in the glass of the divine holiness, and the hateful contrariety that is in it to the nature of God is discovered in the immediate light of all his perfections, his wisdom, his truth, and his goodness. They behold the evil of sin in the marks of the sufferings of their blessed Saviour; he appears in glory as the Lamb that was slain, and carries some memorials of his death about him, to let the saints know for ever what he has suffered to make atonement for their sins.

Nor have the blessed above, any need to learn how dreadfully God can punish sin and sinners, while they behold his indignation going forth in a long and endless stream, to make the wicked enemies of God in hell for ever justly miserable; and in this sense it may be said, that the smoke of their torment comes up before God and his holy angels, and his saints for ever.

Nor do these happy beings stand in need of new sensations of pain, to teach them the exceeding greatness of the love of Christ, who exposed himself to intense and smarting anguish, both of flesh and spirit, to procure their salvation; for while they dwell amidst the blessedness of that state, which the Redeemer purchased with the price of his own sufferings, they can never forget his love.

Nor do they want to learn in heaven the value of

the word of God and his promises, by which they were supported under their pains and sorrows in this mortal state. Those promises have been fulfilled to them partly on earth, and in a more glorious and abundant manner in the heavenly world. They relish the sweetness of all those words of mercy, in reviewing the means whereby divine grace sustained them in their former state of trial, and in the complete accomplishment of the best of those promises in their present situation amidst ten thousand endless blessings.

And if any of them were too cold and remiss, and unfrequent in their applications to the mercy-seat by prayer, when they were here on earth, and stood in need of chastisement to make them pour out their prayers to God, yet they can never forget the value of this privilege, while they themselves dwell round about the throne, and behold all their ancient sincere addresses to the mercy-seat answered and swallowed up in the full fruition of their present glories and joys. Praise is properly the language of heaven, when all their wants are supplied, and their prayers on earth are finished; and whatever farther desires they may have to present before God, the throne of grace is ever at hand, and God himself is ever in the midst of them to bestow every proper blessing in its season that belongs to the heavenly world. Not one of them can any more stand in need of chastisement or painful exercises of the flesh to drive them to the throne of God, while they are at home in their Father's house, and for ever near him and his all-sufficiency. It is from thence they are constantly deriving immortal supplies of blessedness, as from a spring that will never fail.

SECTION V.

I proceed now to consider in the last place, what are the practical lessons which pain may teach us

while we are here on earth in our state of probation and discipline, and shall afterward make it evident, that there is no need of pain in heaven for the same purposes.

1. The frequent returns of pain may put us in mind to offer to God his due sacrifices of praise for the months and years of ease which we have enjoyed: we are too ready to forget the mercy of God herein, unless we are awakened by new and painful sensations; and when we experience new relief, then our lips are opened with thankfulness, and our mouth shows forth his praise; then we cry out with devout language, Blessed be the Lord that has delivered us! When we have been oppressed for some time with extreme anguish, then one day, or one hour of ease fills the heart and the tongue with thankfulness; blessed be the God of nature that has appointed medicines to restore our ease, and blessed be that goodness that has given success to them! What a rich mercy is it under our acute torments, that there are methods of relief and healing found among the powers of nature, among the plants and the herbs, and the mineral stores which are under ground. Blessed be the Lord, who in the course of his providence has given skill to physicians to compose and to apply the proper means of relief! Blessed be that hand that has planted every herb in the field or the garden, and has made the bowels of the earth to teem with medicines for the recovery of our health and ease; and blessed be his name who has rebuked our maladies, who has constrained the smarting diseases to depart by the use of balms and balsams that are happily applied!

While we enjoy the benefits of common life, in health of body and in easy circumstances we are too often thoughtless of the hand of God, which showers down these favours of heaven upon us in a long and constant succession; but when he sees fit to touch us

with his finger, and awaken some lurking malady within us, our ease vanishes, our days are restless and painful, and tiresome nights of darkness pass over us without sleep or repose. Then we repent that we have so long forgotten the God of our mercies; and we learn to lift up our praises to the Lord, that every night of our lives has not been restless, that every day and hour has not been a season of racking pain. Blessed be the Lord that enables us, without anguish or uneasiness, to fulfil the common business of the day; and blessed be his hand that draws the peaceful curtains of the night round about us! And even in the midst of moderate pains, we bless his name who gives us refreshing slumbers; and we grow more careful to employ and improve every moment of returning ease, as the most proper way of expressing our thankfulness to our Almighty healer.

Alas, what poor, sorry, sinful creatures are we in the present state, who want to be taught the value of our mercies by the removal of them! The man of a robust and vigorous make, and a healthy constitution, knows not the true worth of health and ease, nor sets a due value upon these blessings of heaven; but we are taught to thank God feelingly for an easy hour after long repeated twinges of pain; we bless that goodness which gives us an easy night after a day of distressing anguish. Blessed be the God of nature and grace, that has not made the gout or the stone immortal, nor subjected our sensible powers to an everlasting colic or tooth-ach.

2. Pain in the flesh more effectually teaches us to sympathize with those who suffer. We learn a tenderness of soul experimentally by our own sufferings. We generally love self so well, that we forget our neighbours under special tribulation and distress, unless we are made to feel them too. In a particular manner, when our nature is pinched and pierced through with some smarting malady, we learn to pity

those who lie groaning under the same disease. A kindred of sorrows and sufferings works up our natures into compassion, and we find our own hearts more sensibly affected with the groans of our friends under a sharp fit of the gout or rheumatism, when we ourselves have felt the stings of the same distemper.

Our blessed Saviour himself, though he wanted not compassion and love to the children of men, since he came down from heaven on purpose to die for them, yet he is represented to us as our merciful High Priest, who had learned sympathy and compassion to our sorrows in the same way of experience as we learn it. He was encompassed about with infirmities, when he took the sinless frailties of our nature upon him, that he might learn to pity us under those frailties. In that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted: for we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points like as we are, though he was always without sin; and by the things which he suffered, he may be said, after the manner of men, to learn sympathy and pity to miserable creatures, as well as obedience to God, who is blessed for ever, Heb. ii. 18: and iv. 15: and v. 2, 8.

3. Since our natures are subject to pain, it should teach us watchfulness against every sin, lest we double our own distresses by the mixture of guilt with them. How careful should we be to keep always a clear conscience, that we may be able at all times to look up with pleasure to the hand of God who smites us, and be better composed to endure the pains which he inflicts upon us for our trial and improvement in grace. Innocence and piety, and a peaceful conscience, are an admirable defence to support the spirit against the overwhelming efforts of bodily pain; but when inward reproaches of mind, and a racking con-

science join with acute pain in the flesh, it is double misery, and aggravated wretchedness. The scourges and inward remorse of our own hearts, joined to the sorrows of nature, add torment to torment. How dreadful is it when we are forced to confess, I have procured all this to myself by intemperance, by my rashness, by my obstinacy against the advice of friends and rebellion against the commands of God!

Probably it was such circumstances as these, that gave the soul of David double anguish, when his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day long, when day and night the hand of God was heavy upon him, and his moisture was turned into the drought of summer; when he complained unto God, "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore: there is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; nor any rest in my bones, because of my sin. Mine iniquities are gone over mine head, as a heavy burden: they are too heavy for me. Deep calls unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts, all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." The deep of anguish in my flesh calls to the deep of sorrow in my soul, and makes a tremendous tumult within me. "My wounds stink, and are corrupt, because of my foolishness; I am feeble and sore broken; I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart." Nor could he find any rest or ease till he acknowledged his sin unto God, and confessed his transgressions, and till he had some comfortable hope that God had forgiven the iniquity of his sin. See this sorrowful scene exemplified in a very affecting manner in the 32d and 38th Psalms. Happy is the man that walks closely with his God in the days of health and ease, that whenever it shall please his heavenly Father to try him with smarting pain, he may find sweet relief from a peaceful conscience, and humble appeals to God concerning his own sincerity and watchfulness.

4. Pain in the flesh may sometimes be sent by the hand of God to teach us to wean ourselves by degrees from this body, which we love too well; this body, which has all the springs of pain in it. How little should we be fond of this flesh and blood in the present feeble state, wherein we are continually liable to one malady or another; to the head-ache or the heart-ache, to wounds or bruises, and uneasy sensations of various kinds! nor can the soul secure itself from them, while it is so closely united to this mortal body. And yet we are too fond of our present dwelling, though it be but a cottage of clay, feeble and ruinous where the winds and the storms are continually ready to break in and distress us. A sorry habitation indeed for an immortal spirit, since sin has mingled so many diseases in our constitution, has made so many avenues for smart and anguish in our flesh, and we are capable of admitting pain and agonies at every pore.

Pain is appointed to be a sort of balance to the tempting pleasures of life, and to make us feel that perfect happiness does not grow among the inhabitants of flesh and blood. Pain takes away the pleasures of the day and the repose of the night, and makes life bitter in all the returning seasons. The God of nature and grace is pleased by sending sickness and pain, to loosen his own children by degrees from their fond attachment to this fleshly tabernacle, and to make us willing to depart at his call.

A long continuance of pain, or the frequent repeated twinges of it, will teach a Christian and incline him to meet death with courage at the appointed hour of release. This will much abate the fierceness of the king of terrors when he appears as a sovereign physician to finish every malady of nature. Death is sanctified to the holy soul, and by the covenant of grace this curse of nature is changed into a blessing. The grave is a safe retiring place from all the attacks

of disease and anguish; and there are some incurables here on earth, which can find no perfect relief but in the grave. Neither maladies nor tyrants can stretch their terrors beyond this life; and if we can but look upon death as a conquered enemy, and its sting taken away by the death of Christ, we shall easily venture into this last combat, and obtain an everlasting victory. Blessed be God for the grave as a refuge from smarting pains! Thanks be to God through Christ Jesus, who enables us to triumph over the last pain of nature, and to say, "O death, where is thy sting?" and "O grave, where is thy victory?"

In the fifth and last place, by the pains that we suffer in this body, we are taught to breathe after the blessedness of the heavenly state, wherein there shall be no pain. When the soul is dismissed from the bonds of flesh, and presented before God in the world of spirits without spot or blemish by Jesus our great Forerunner, it is then appointed to dwell among the spirits of the just made perfect, who were all released in their several seasons from the body of flesh and sin. Maladies and infirmities of every kind are buried in the grave, and cease for ever; and if we survey the properties of the new-raised body in the great resurrection-day, as described 1 Cor. xv., we shall find no room for pain there, no avenue or residence for smart or anguish. It will not be such a body of flesh and blood which can be a source of maladies or subject to outward injuries; but by its own principles of innate vigour and immortality, as well as by the power and mercy of God, it shall be for ever secure from those uneasy sensations which made our flesh on earth painful and burdensome, and which tended toward dissolution and death. It is such a body as our Lord Jesus wore at his ascent to heaven in a bright cloud, for ever incorruptible; for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither

doth corruption inherit incorruption." As we have borne the image of the earthly Adam in the frailties and sufferings that belong to it, "so shall we also bear the image of the heavenly," even the Lord Jesus Christ, "who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself," Phil. iii. 21. We shall hunger no more, we shall thirst no more, nor shall the sun light on us with its parching beams, nor shall we be annoyed with fire or frost, with heat or cold, in those temperate and happy regions. The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed his people for ever there with the fruits of the tree of life, and with unknown entertainments suited to a glorified state. "He shall lead them to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Thus have I set before you the practical lessons which pain is designed to teach us in our present state; and we find that a body subject to maladies and pains, is a well-appointed school, wherein our great Master gives us these divine instructions, and trains us up by degrees for the heavenly world. It is rough discipline indeed for the flesh, but it is wholesome for the soul: and there is many a Christian here on earth that have been made to confess, they had never learnt the practice of some of these virtues, if they had not been taught by such sort of discipline. Pain, which was brought into human nature at first by sin, is happily suited by the providence of God to such a state of probation, wherein creatures born in the midst of sins and sorrows are by degrees recovered to the love of God and holiness, and fitted for a world of peace and joy.

But when we have done with this world, and departed from the tribes of mortal men, and from all the scenes of allurement and temptation, there is no

more need that such lessons should be taught us in heaven, nor any painful scourge made use of by the Father of spirits, to carry on or to maintain the divine work of holiness and grace within us. Let us survey this matter according to the foregoing particulars.

Is it possible that while the blessed above are surrounded with endless satisfactions flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb, they should forget their Benefactor, and neglect his praises? Is it possible they should dwell in immortal health and ease without interruption, under the constant vital influences of the King of glory, and yet want gratitude to the Spring of all their blessings?

Nor is there any need for the inhabitants of a world, where no pains nor sorrows are found, to learn compassion and sympathy to those who suffer, for there are no sufferers there: but love and joy, intense and intimate love, and a harmony of joy, runs through all that blessed company, and unites them in a universal sympathy, (if I may so express it,) or blissful sensation of each other's happiness. And I might add also, could there be such a thing as sorrow and misery in those regions, this divine principle of love would work sweetly and powerfully towards such objects in all necessary compassion.

What if pain was once made a spur to our duties in this frail state of flesh and blood? What if pain were designed as a guard against temptation, and a means to awaken our watch against new transgression and guilt? But in a climate where all is holiness, and all is peace, in the full enjoyment of the great God and secured by that everlasting covenant which was sealed by the blood of the Lamb, there is no more danger of sinning. The soul is moulded into the more complete likeness of God, by living for ever under the light of his countenance, and the warmest beams of his love.

What if we had need of the stings of pain and anguish in time past, to wean us by degrees from this body, and from all sensible things, and to make us willing to part with them all at the call of God? Yet when we arrive at the heavenly world, we shall have no more need of being weaned from earth, we shall never look back upon that state of pain and frailty with a wishful eye, being for ever satisfied in the affluence of present joys.

O glorious and happy state! where millions of creatures who have dwelt in bodies of sin and pain, and have been guilty of innumerable follies and offences against their Maker, yet are all forgiven; their robes are washed, and made white in the blood of Jesus, their iniquities are cancelled for ever, and there shall not be one stroke more from the hand of God to chasten them, nor one more sensation of pain to punish them. Divine and illustrious privilege indeed, and a glorious world, where complete sanctification of all the powers of nature shall for ever secure us from new sins, and where the springs and causes of pain shall for ever cease, both within us and without us. Our glorified bodies shall have no avenue for pain to enter; the gates of heaven shall admit no enemy to afflict or hurt us; God is our everlasting friend, and our souls shall be satisfied with the rivers of pleasure which grow for ever at the right hand of God. Amen.

DISCOURSE X.

THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT, OR, THE FORETASTE OF HEAVEN.

ROM. viii. 23.

And not only they, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of the body.

SECTION I.

IT is by a beautiful figure of speech the apostle had been describing, in the foregoing verses, the unnatural abuse which the creatures suffer through the sins of men, when they are employed to sinful purposes and the dishonour of God their Creator. Permit me to read the words and represent the sense of them in a short paraphrase. Ver. 22: "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." The earth itself may be represented as groaning to bear such loads of iniquity, such a multitude of wicked men who abuse the creatures of God to the dishonour of him that made them. The air may be said to groan to give breath to those vile wretches who abuse it in filthiness and foolish talking, to the dishonour of God, and to the scandal of their neighbours; it groans to furnish men with breath that is abused in idolatry by the false worship of the true God, or the worship of creatures which is

abominable in his sight. The sun itself may be said to groan to give light to those sinners who abuse both day-light and darkness in rioting and wantonness, in doing mischief among men and committing fresh iniquities against their Maker. The moon and stars are abused by adulterers and thieves, and other midnight sinners, when they any way afford light enough to them to guide them in their pursuit of wicked ways and practices. The beasts of burden may be said also to groan and be abused, when they bear the wicked sons and daughters of Adam to the accomplishment of their iniquities: and even all the parts of the brutal world, as well as of the inanimate creation, are some way or other made to serve the detestable and wicked purposes of the sinful children of men, and may be figuratively said to groan on this account. And if we have tasted of the fruits of the Spirit of grace, we cannot but in some measure groan with the rest of the creation in expectation of the blessed day, when the creatures shall be delivered from this bondage of corruption, to which the providence of God has suffered them to be subjected in this degenerate state of things.

We hope there is a time coming, when the creatures themselves shall be used according to the original appointment of their Maker, agreeable to their own first design, and for the good of their fellow creatures, and supremely for the honour of their God in that day when "holiness unto the Lord shall be written upon the bells of the horses;" and every pot in Jerusalem shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts. Why should we not join them with the whole creation in groaning and longing after this promised time, when all the works of God shall be restored to their rightful use, and the glory of the Maker shall some way or other be made to shine in every one of them?

The apostle then adds, in the words of my text, and not these creatures only, but ourselves also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we who are filled with the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, and eminently the first fruits hereof appear in our taste and relish of the divine provisions that God has given us here in this world to prepare for a better: and even bestows upon some of his Christian servants these first fruits of the tree of paradise, these blessings and these foretastes which are near akin to those of the upper world, when the saints shall be raised from the dead, when their adoption shall be clearly manifested, and they shall look like the children of God, and their bodies and all their natural powers shall be redeemed from those disorders, whether of sin or sorrow, and from all the springs and seeds of them, which they are more or less liable to feel in the present state.

Here let it be observed, that the first fruits of any field, or plant, or tree, are of the same kind with the full product or the harvest: therefore it is plain, that the first fruits of the Spirit in this place cannot chiefly signify the gifts of the Spirit, such as the gifts of tongues, or of healing, or of miracles, nor the gifts of prophecy, preaching, or praying, because these are not the employments nor the enjoyments of heaven. The first fruits of the Spirit must rather refer therefore to the knowledge and holiness, the graces and the joys which are more perfect and glorious in the heavenly state, than they were ever designed to be here upon earth. Now these first fruits of graces and joys are sometimes bestowed upon Christians in this world, in such a degree as brings them near to the heavenly state; and that is the chief observation I design to draw from these words, viz: That God has been pleased to give some of his children here on earth several of the foretastes of the heavenly blessedness, the graces and the joys of the upper world; as

they are the first fruits of that paradise to which we are travelling; and these privileges have brought some of the saints within the verge of the courts of heaven, within the confines and borders of the celestial country. What these are I shall show immediately; but before I represent them I desire to lay down these few cautions.

Caution 1. These sensible foretastes of heaven do not belong to all Christians; these are not such general blessings of the covenant of grace, of which every Christian is made partaker; but they are special favours now and then bestowed on some particular persons by the special will of God. 1. Such as are more eminent in faith, and holiness, and prayer than others are, such as have made great advancements in every part of religion, in mortification to the world, in spiritual-mindedness, in humility, and in much converse with God, &c. Or, 2. Sometimes these first fruits may be given unto such as are weak both in reason and in faith, and may be babes in Christ, and are not able by their reasoning powers to search out their evidences for heaven, especially under some present temptation or darkness. Or, 3. Sometimes to those who are called by Providence to go through huge and uncommon trials and sufferings, in order to support their spirits, and bear up their courage, their faith and patience.

It is true, the more general and common way whereby God prepares his people for heaven, is by leading them through several steps of advancing holiness, sincere repentance, mortification of sin, weanedness from the world, likeness to God, heavenly-mindedness, &c. These are indeed the usual preparatives for glory, and the surest evidences of a state of grace. Therefore let not any person imagine he is not a true Christian, because he hath not enjoyed these special favours and signal manifestations.

Caution 2. If there be any who have been favoured with these peculiar blessings, thay must not expect them to be constant and perpetual, nor always to be given in the same manner or same measure; they are rare blessings and special reviving cordials; they are not the common food of Christians, nor the daily nourishment of the saints. The word of God, and the grace of Christ in the promises is our daily support, and the constant nourishment of our souls. Cordials are not given for our daily nourishment in the life of grace.

Caution 3. However great and rapturous these foretastes may be, let us not so depend on them as to neglect the more substantial and solid evidences for heaven, and those steps of preparation which I have elsewhere mentioned. Let not those who have enjoyed them give a loose to their souls, and let go their watchfulness, or neglect their daily mortification and diligence in every duty. Some of these divine raptures have sometimes been so nearly counterfeited by raptures of fancy, by warm self-love, or perhaps by the deceit of evil angels, that they are not so safe a foundation for our dependence and assured hope, as the soul's experience of a sincere repentance, and general turn of heart to God, and mortification of sin, and delight in every practice of holiness. The devil sometimes has transformed himself into an angel of light, 2 Cor. xi. 14. And there have been some who at first hearing of the gospel have had wondrous raptures. Heb. vi. 4: It is said, they have tasted of the powers of the world to come, &c., who have yet fallen away again, and having lost all their sense and savour of divine things, have become vile apostates.

Caution 4. If you seem to enjoy any of these affectionate and rapturous foretastes of heaven, be jealous of the truth of them, if they have not a propor-

tionable sanctifying influence upon your souls and your actions.

If you find they incline you to negligence in duty, to coldness in the common practices of religion and godliness, if they make you fancy that common ordinances are a low and needless dispensation, if they seem to excuse you from diligence in the common duties of life towards man, or religion towards God, there is great reason then to suspect them; there is danger lest they should be mere suggestions and deceitful workings either of your own natural passions, or the crafty snares of the artful and busy adversary of souls, on purpose to make you neglect solid religion, and make you part with what is substantial for a bright and flashy glimpse of heavenly things.

But, on the other hand, if you find that these special favours and enjoyments raise your hearts to a greater nearness to God, and more constant converse with him; if they keep you deep in humility, and in everlasting dependence on the grace of Christ in the gospel, and warm and zealous attendance on the ordinances of worship; if they teach and incline you to fulfil every duty of love to your neighbour, and particularly to your fellow Christians, then they appear to be the fruits of the Spirit; and as they fit you for every duty and every providence here upon earth, there is very good reason to hope they are real visits from heaven, and are sent from the God of all grace to make you more meet for the heavenly glory.

SECTION II.

These are the four cautions. I proceed now to describe some of these foretastes of the heavenly blessedness, and show how nearly they resemble the blessedness and enjoyments of the heavenly world.

First, In heaven there is a near view of God in his glories, with such a fixed contemplation of his several perfections, as draws out the heart into all cor-

respondent exercises, in an uncommon, transcendent and supreme degree. It is described as one of the felicities of heaven, that we shall see God, Matt. v. 8, that we shall behold him face to face, and not in shadows and glasses, 1 Cor. xiii. 12. Let us exhibit some particulars of this kind, and dwell a little upon them in the most easy and natural method.

1. In heaven the blessed inhabitants behold the majesty and greatness of God in such a light as fixes their thoughts in glorious wonder and the humblest adoration, and exalts them to the highest pleasure and praise. Have you never fallen into such a devout and fixed contemplation of the majesty of God, as to be even astonished at his glory and greatness, and to have your souls so swallowed up in this sight, that all the sorrows and the joys of this life, all the businesses and necessities of it have been forgotten for a season, all things below and beneath God have seemed as nothing in your eyes? All the grandeurs and splendours of mortality have been buried in darkness and oblivion, and creatures have, as it were, vanished from the thoughts and been lost, as the stars die and vanish at the rising sun, and are no more seen? Have you never seen the face of God in his sublime grandeur, excellence and majesty, so as to shrink into the dust before him and lie low at his feet with humblest adoration? And you have been transported into a feeling acknowledgment of your own nothingness in the presence of God. Such a sight the prophet Isaiah seems to have enjoyed, Is. lx. 12, 15, 17: "Behold the nations before him are as the drop of the bucket, and as the small dust of the balance, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. All nations before him are as nothing: they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity."

When the lips are not only directed to speak this sublime language, but the soul, as it were, beholds God in these heights of transcendent majesty, it is

overwhelmed with blessed wonder and surprising delight, even while it adores in most profound lowliness and self-abasement. This is the emblem of the worship of the heavenly world, see Rev. iv. 10, where the elders, saints, and prophets, martyrs, angels, and dominions, and principalities of the highest degree cast down their crowns at the foot of him that made them, and exalt God in his supremacy over all.

2. In heaven there are such blessed and extensive surveys of the infinite knowledge of God, and his amazing wisdom discovered in his works, as makes even all their own heavenly improvements in knowledge and understanding to appear as mere ignorance, darkness, and folly before him. In such an hour as this is the holy angels may charge themselves with folly in his sight, as he beholds them in the imperfection of their understanding. Now have you never been carried away in your meditations of the all-comprehensive knowledge of God to such a degree, as to lose and abandon all your former pride and appearances of knowledge and wisdom in all the native and acquired riches of it, and count them all as nothing in his sight? Have you never looked upward to the midnight skies, and with amazement sent your thoughts upward to him who calls all the stars by their names, and brings them forth in all their sparkling glories, who marshals them in their nightly ranks and orders, and then stood overwhelmed with sacred astonishment at the wisdom which made and ranged them all in their proper situations, and there appointed them to fulfil ten thousand useful purposes, and that not only towards this little ball of earth, but to a multitude of upper planetary worlds? Have you never inquired into the wonders of his wisdom in framing the bodies, the limbs, and the senses of millions of animals, birds, and beasts, fishes and insects, as well as men all around this globe, and who hath framed all their organs and powers of

nature with exquisite skill, to see and hear, to run and fly, and swim, to produce their young in all their proper forms and sizes, furnished with their various powers, and to feed and nourish them in their innumerable shapes and colours, admirable for strength and beauty? And have you not felt your souls filled with devout adoration at the unspeakable and infinite contrivances of a God?

And not only his works of creation, but of his providence too have afforded some pious souls such devout amazement. What astonishing wisdom must that be which has created mankind on earth near six thousand years ago, and by his divine word in every age continues to create them or give them being, with all the same natural powers and parts, beauties, and excellencies! That he hath wisely governed so many millions of animals with living souls or spirits in them, so many millions of intelligent creatures, endued with a free will of their own to choose or refuse what they will or will not do, and hath managed this innumerable company of beings in all ages, notwithstanding all their different and clashing opinions and customs, their crossing humours, wills, and passions in endless variety, and yet hath made them all subservient to his own comprehensive designs and purposes through all ages of the world and all nations on earth! What inconceivable wisdom is that which hath effectually appointed them all to centre in the accomplishment of his own eternal counsels! And with what overwhelming amazement will this scene appear, when he shall shut up the theatre of this earth, and fold up these heavens as a curtain, and this visible structure of things shall be laid in ashes? What an astonishing view must this be of the all-surveying knowledge, all-comprehending wisdom of God, and with what holy and humble pleasure must the pious soul be filled who takes in and enjoys this scene of infinite varieties and wonders? How near

doth such an hour approach to the bliss of heaven and the raptures of contemplation, which belong to the blessed inhabitants of it.

I might add something of the almighty power of God in his creation and government of the world, in his kingdoms of nature and providence. Did not the angels rejoice at the birth-day of this universe, and those morning stars shout for joy at the first appearance of this creation? And what the inhabitants of heaven make their song, may not a holy soul be entertained with it, even to ecstasy and rapture? I behold, says he, in divine meditation, I behold this huge structure of the universe rising out of nothing at the voice of his command; I behold the several planets in their various orders set a moving by the same power. With what delightful surprise do I hear him pronouncing the words, Let there be light, and lo, the light appears! Let there be earth and seas; let there be clouds and heavens; let there be sun, moon, and stars, and lo, the heavens, and the dry land, and the waters appear, the clouds and the stars in their various order and situation, and all the parts arise all replenished with proper ornaments and animals according to his word. At his command nature exists in all its regions with all its furniture; the beasts, and birds, and fishes in all their forms arise, and at once they obey the several almighty orders he gave, and by the unknown and inconceivable force of such a word they leap out into existence in ten thousand forms.

Again, what divine pleasure is it to hear God beginning the work of his providence, and speaking those wondrous words of power to every plant and animal, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," and lo, in a long succession of near six thousand years, the earth has been covered all over with herbs and plants, with shrubs and tall trees in all their beauty and dimensions. The air hath been filled

with birds and insects, the seas and rivers with fish, and the dry land with beasts and men even to this present day. When all this philosophy is changed into devotion, it must also be transformed into divine and unutterable joy.

Nor are these things too low and mean for the contemplation of heavenly beings; for God is seen in all of them; there is not a spire of grass but the power and wisdom of a God are visible therein. And it is certain the heavenly beings must be sometimes employed in the contemplation of many of these lower wonders. The plants and beasts in desolate regions where no man inhabits, and in distant and foreign oceans and rivers, where the fishy shoals in all their variety and numbers, in all their successions and generations for near six thousand years were never seen nor known by any of the sons of men; these seem to have been created in vain, if no heavenly beings are acquainted with them, nor raise a revenue of glory to him that made them.

This almighty power therefore which made this huge universe, which sustains the frame of it every moment, and secures it from dissolving, this power which brings forth the stars in their order, and worms and creeping things in their innumerable millions, and governs all the motions of them to the purposes of divine glory, must needs affect a contemplative soul with raptures of pleasing meditation; and in these sublime meditations, by the aids of the divine Spirit, a soul on earth may get near to heaven. And with what religious and unknown pleasure at such a season doth it shrink its own being as it were into an atom, and lie in the dust and adore!

4. The all-sufficiency of the great God to form and to supply every creature with all that it can want or desire is another perfection of the divine nature, which is better known in heaven than it ever was here on earth, and affords another scene of astonishment and

sacred delight, and there may be some advances towards this pleasure found among saints below, some first fruits of this heavenly felicity and joy in the all-sufficiency of God.

My whole self, body and mind, is from God, and from him alone. All my limbs and powers of flesh and spirit were derived from him, and borrowed their first existence from their original pattern in his fruitful mind. All that I have of life or comfort, of breath or being, with all my blessings round about me, is owing to his boundless and eternal fulness; and all my long reaching hopes and endless expectations that stretch far into futurity, and an eternal world, are growing out of this same all-sufficient fulness.

But what do I think or speak of so little a trifle as I am? Stretch thy thoughts, O my soul, through the lengths, and breadths, and depths of his creation. O what an inconceivable fulness of being, glory, and excellency is found in God, the universal parent and spring of all! What an inexhaustible ocean of being and life, of perfection and blessedness must our God be, who supplies all the infinite armies of his creatures in all his known and unknown dominions with life and motion, with breath and activity, with food and support, with satisfaction and delight! Who maintains the vital powers and faculties of all the spirits which he hath made in all the visible and invisible worlds, in all his territories of light, and peace, and joy, and in all the regions of darkness, punishment and misery! In him all things live, and move, and have their being, Acts xvii. 28. Psal. civ. 29. He withdraws his breath, and they die. He hath written down all their names in his own mind, he gives them all their natures, and without him there is nothing, there can be nothing; all nature without him would have been a perpetual blank, a universal emptiness, an everlasting void, and with one turn of his will he could sink and dissolve all nature into its original nothing.

Confess, O my soul, thy own nothingness in his presence, and with astonishing pleasure and worship adore his fulness; he is thy everlasting all. Be thy dependence ever fixed upon him; thou canst not, thou shalt not live a moment without him, without this habitual dependence, and a frequent delightful acknowledgment of it. Such a devout frame as this is heaven, and such scenes now and then passing through the soul are glimpses of the heavenly blessedness.

SECTION III.

Though the eternity and immensity of God might perhaps in their own nature, and in the reason of things, be first mentioned, yet his majesty, his power and his wisdom in their sovereign excellency, strike the souls of creatures more immediately, therefore I have put these first. However, let us now consider the eternity of the great God and his omnipresence, and think how the spirits in heaven are affected therewith, and what kindred meditations may be derived from these perfections by the saints here on earth. I proceed, therefore,

5. To the eternity of God; which though the most exalted spirit in heaven cannot comprehend, yet it is probable they have some nearer and clearer discovery of it, than we can have here in this mortal state, while we dwell in flesh and blood. We have nothing in this visible world that gives us so much as an example or similitude of it. The great God who is, who was, and who is to come through all ages, he is, and was, and for ever will be the same. Let us go back as many thousand ages as we can in our thoughts, and still an eternal God was before them; a being that had no beginning of his existence, nor will have any end of his life or duration. And as he says to Moses, My name is, "I AM THAT I AM," so as there is nothing which had any hand in his being,

but all the reasons of it are derived from his own self-fulness, therefore we may say of him, that he is because he is, and because he will be; he had no spring of his first beginning, nor any cause of his continued existence but what is within himself. We can never set ourselves in too mean a light when an eternal God is near us; and every thing besides God can be but little in our eyes.

And, O my thinking powers, are ye not sweetly lost in this holy rapture, and overpowered with Divine pleasure, O my soul, in such meditation as this? Art thou not delightfully surprised with the thoughts of such self-sufficience and such an inconceivable perfection? Thy being considered as here in this life, is not so much in the sight of God as an atom in comparison of the whole earth; and even the supposed future ages of thy existence in the eternal state are inconceivably short, when compared with the glory of that being that never began his life or his duration.

Many things here on earth concur towards my satisfaction and peace, but if I have God my friend, I have all in him that I can possibly want or desire. Let me then live no longer upon creatures when God is all.

Let sun, moon and stars vanish, and all this visible creation disappear and be for ever annihilated if God please, he himself is still my eternal hope and never-failing spring of all my blessedness; my expectations are continually safe in his hands, and shall never fail while I am so near to him. This is joy unspeakable and akin to glory.

6. Let us meditate also on the immensity of God, which I think is much better expressed by his omnipresence. God is wheresoever any creature is or can be; knowing immediately by his own presence all that belongs to them, all that they are or can be, all that they do or can do, all that concerns them, whether their sins or their virtues, their pains or their

pleasures, their hopes or their fears. It implies also that he doth by his immediate power and influence support and govern all the creatures. In short, this immensity is nothing else but the infinite extent of his knowledge and his power, and it reaches to and beyond all places as eternity reaches to and beyond all time. This the blessed above know and rejoice in, and take infinite satisfaction therein; having God as it were surrounding them on all sides, so that they cannot be where he is not, he is ever present with his all-sufficiency ready to bestow on them all they wish or desire while he continues their God, that is, for ever and ever. They are under the blessing of his eye, and the care of his hand, to guard them from every evil, and to secure their peace.

Let thy flesh or spirit be surrounded with never so many thousand dangers or enemies, they cannot do thee the least damage without his leave by force or by surprise, while such an almighty being is all around thee; nor hast thou reason to indulge any fear while the spring and ocean of all life, activity, and blessedness thus secures thee on every side. If thou hast the evidences of his children on thee, thou possessest an eternal security of thy peace.

7. The sovereignty and dominion of the blessed God is a farther meditation and pleasure which becomes and adorns the inhabitants of the heavenly world. There he reigns upon the throne of his glory, and the greater part of the territories which are subject to him are less in their view than our scanty powers of nature or perception can now apprehend, and a proportionable degree of pleasure is found with the saints above in these contemplations.

But in our present state of mortality our souls can only look through these lattices of flesh and blood, and make a few scanty and imperfect inferences from what they always see, and hear, and feel: and yet

the glorious sovereignty and dominion of the blessed God may so penetrate the soul with a divine sense of it here on earth as to raise up a heaven of wonder and joy within.

Adore him, O my soul, who surveys and rules all things which he has made with an absolute authority, and is for ever uncontrollable. How righteous a thing is it that he should give laws to all the beings which his hand hath formed, which his breath hath spoken into life, and especially that rank which his favour hath furnished with immortality. How just that he should be obeyed by every creature without the least reluctance or reserve, without a moment's delay, and that to all the length of their existence.

Submit to his government with pleasure, O my nature, and be all ye my powers of soul and body in everlasting readiness to do whatsoever he requires, and to be whatsoever he appoints. Wilt thou have me, O Lord, lie under sickness or pain, wilt thou have me languish under weakness and confinement? I am at thy foot, I am for ever at thy disposal. Wilt thou have me active and vigorous in thy service? Lord, I am ready with utmost cheerfulness. Wilt thou confine me to painful idleness and long patience? Lord, here I am: do with me what seemeth good unto thee. I am ready to serve thy purposes here, or thy orders in the unknown world of spirits, when thou shalt dissolve this mortal frame; I lay down these limbs in the dust of death at thy command; I venture into the regions of angels and unbodied minds at thy summons. I will be what thou wilt, I will go when thou wilt, I will dwell where thou wilt; for thou art always with me and I am entirely thine. I both rejoice and tremble at thy sovereignty and dominion over all. God cannot do injury to a creature who is so entirely his own property; God will not deal unkindly with a creature who is so sensible of his

just dominion and supremacy, and which bows at the foot of his sovereignty with so much relish of satisfaction.

8. Let us next take notice of the perfect purity of the nature of God, his universal holiness, the rectitude of the divine nature manifested in all his thoughts, his works, and his words, all perfectly agreeable to the eternal rules of truth and righteousness, and at the farthest distance from every thing that is false and faulty, every thing that is or can be dishonourable to so glorious a being. Have we never seen God in this light, in the glory of his holiness, his universal rectitude, and the everlasting harmony of all his perfections in exact correspondence with all the notions we can have of truth and reason? And has not God appeared then as a glorious and lovely being? And have we not at the same time beheld ourselves as unclean and unholy creatures, in one part or other of our natures ever ready to jar or fall out with some of the most pure and perfect rules of holiness, justice, or truth? Have we not seen all our sins and iniquities in this light, with utmost abhorrence and highest hatred of them, and looked down upon ourselves with a deep and overwhelming sense of shame and displeasure against our depraved and corrupted natures, and abased ourselves as Job does in dust and ashes. and not daring to open our mouths before him? Job xlii. 6: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, and I abhor myself in dust and ashes." The least spot or blemish of sin grows highly offensive and painful to the eyes of a saint in this situation.

Every little warping from truth in our conversation, every degree of insincerity or fraud becomes a smarting uneasiness to the mind in the remembrance of our past follies in the present state. There is the highest abhorrence of sin among all the heavenly inhabitants; and this sight of God in the beauties of his

holiness, and his perfect rectitude, is an everlasting preservative to holy souls against the admission of an impure or unholy thought; and therefore some divines have supposed, that the angels at their first creation were put into a state of trial, before they were admitted to this full sight of the beauty of God in his holiness, which would have secured them from the least thought or step towards apostacy.

O my soul, of what happy importance it is to thee to maintain, as long as possible, this sense of the purity, rectitude, and perfection of the nature of the blessed God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with the least regard of approbation or allowance! And what infinite condescension is it in such a God to find out and appoint a way of grace, whereby such shameful polluted creatures as we are should ever be admitted into his presence to make the least address to his majesty, or to hope for his favour!

Besides, in this sublime view of the holiness of God, we shall not only love God better than ever, as we see him more amiable under this view of his glorious attributes, but we shall grow more sincere and fervent in our love to all that is holy, to every fellow Christian, to every saint in heaven and on earth: we shall not bear any estrangedness or alienation from those who have so much of the likeness of God in them. They will ever appear to be the excellent of the earth, in whom is all our delight; their supposed blemishes will vanish at the thought of their likeness to God in holiness; and especially our blessed Lord Jesus, the Son of God, will be most precious and all-glorious in our eyes, as he is the most perfect image of his Father's holiness. There is nothing in the blessed God, but the man Christ Jesus bears a proportionable resemblance to it, as far as a creature can resemble God, and he will consequently be highest in our esteem under God the Lord and Father of all.

9. The ever-pleasing attribute of Divine goodness and love is another endless and joyful theme or object of the contemplation of the heavenly world. There this perfection shines in its brightest rays, there it displays its most triumphant glories, and kindles a flame of everlasting joy in all the sons of blessedness.

But we in this world may have such glimpses of this goodness and love as may fill the soul with unspeakable pleasure, and begin in it the first fruits and earnest of heaven. When we survey the inexhaustible ocean of goodness which is in God, which fills and supplies all the creatures with every thing they stand in need of; when we behold all the tribes of the sons of men supported by his boundless sufficiency, his bounty and kind providence, and refreshed with a thousand comforts beyond what the mere necessities of nature require. In such an hour, if we feel the least flowings of goodness in ourselves towards others, we shall humble ourselves to the dust, and cry out in holy amazement, Lord, what is an atom to a mountain! What is a drop to a river, a sea of beneficence! What is a shadow to the eternal substance! What good thing is there in time or in eternity, which I can possibly want which is not abundantly supplied out of thine overflowing fulness! Hence arises the eternal satisfaction of all the holy and happy creation in being so near to thee, and under the everlasting assurances of thy love. I can do nothing but fall down before thee in deepest humility, and admire, adore, and everlastingly love thee, who hast assumed to thyself the name of love. 1 John iv. 8: "God is love."

SECTION IV.

Thus far our joys may rise into an imitation of the joys above, in the devout contemplation of Divine perfections.

And not only the perfections of God, considered and surveyed single in themselves, but the union and blessed harmony of many of them in the Divine works and transactions of providence and of grace, especially in the gospel of Christ, administer farther matter for contemplation and pleasure among the happy spirits in heaven; and so far as this enjoyment may be communicated to the saints here on earth, they may be also said to have a foretaste of the business and pleasure of heaven. Let us take notice of this harmony in several instances.

1. In the sacred constitution of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ as God and man united in one personal agent: here majesty and mercy give a glorious instance of their union, here all the grandeur and dignity of Godhead condescends to join itself in union with a creature, such as man is, a spirit dwelling in flesh and blood. 1 Tim. ii. 5: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, even the man Christ Jesus;" but this man is personally united to the blessed God, he is God manifest in the flesh; he is a man in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, to constitute one all-sufficient Saviour of miserable and fallen mankind. What an amazing stoop or condescension is this, for the eternal Godhead thus to join itself to a creature! And what a surprising exaltation is this of the creature, for the man Christ Jesus thus to be assumed into so near a relation to the blessed God! All the glories that result from this Divine contrivance and transaction are not to be enumerated in paper, nor by the best capacity of writers here on earth; the heavenly inhabitants are much better acquainted with them.

Again, here is an example of the harmony and cooperation of unsearchable wisdom and all-commanding power in the person of the blessed Jesus; and what a happy design is hereby executed, namely, the

reconciliation of sinful man and the holy and glorious God; and who could do this but one who was possessed of such wisdom and such power? When there was no creature in heaven or earth sufficient for this work, God was pleased to appoint such a union between a creature and the Creator, between God and man, as might answer all the inconceivable purposes concealed in his thought. If there be wanting a person fit to execute any of his infinite designs, he will not be frustrated for want of an agent, he will appoint God and man to be so nearly united as to become one agent to execute this design.

2. In the manner of our salvation, namely, by an atonement of sin. The great God did not think it proper, nor agreeable to his sublime holiness, to receive sinful man into his favour without an atonement for sin, and a satisfaction made to the governor of the world for the abuse and violation of his holy law here on earth; and therefore he appointed such a sacrifice of atonement as might be sufficient to do complete honour to the Lawgiver, as well as to save and deliver the offender from death; therefore Jesus was made a man capable of suffering and dying, that he might honour the majesty and the justice of the broken law of God, and that he might do it completely by the union of Godhead to this Man and Mediator; the dignity of whose divinity diffuses itself over all that he did and all that he suffered, so as to make his obedience completely acceptable to God instead of thousands of creatures, and fully satisfactory for the offence that was given him by them: here is a sacrifice provided equal to the guilt of sin, and therefore sufficient to take it away.

You see here what a blessed harmony there is between the justice of God doing honour to his own law, and his compassion resolved to save a ruined creature; here is no blemish cast upon the strict justice and righteousness of God, when the offender

is forgiven in such a method as may do honour to justice and mercy at once. Rom. iii. 24, 25: "We are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness," even his perfect governing justice, though he passes by and pardons the sins of a thousand criminal creatures; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might appear to be just to his own authority and law, while he justifies the sinful man who believeth or trusteth in Jesus the Mediator, as becoming a proper sacrifice and propitiation for sin.

3. By the sanctification of our nature. There is also another remarkable harmony, between the holiness of God and his mercy in this work of the salvation of sinful man. The guilt of sin is not only to be forgiven and taken away by a complete atonement and sacrifice, but the sinful nature of this ruined creature is to be changed into holiness, is to be renewed and sanctified by the blessed Spirit, and reformed into the image of God his Maker: he must not only be released from punishment by forgiveness, but he must be restored to the image of God by sanctifying grace; that so he may be fit company for the rest of the favourites of God in the upper world; that he may be qualified to be admitted into this society where perfect purity and holiness are necessary for all the inhabitants of this upper world, and for such near attendants on the blessed God. In that happy state nothing shall enter there that defileth, Rev. xxi. 27, and therefore concerning the criminals amongst the Corinthians, as vile and as offensive to the pure and holy God as they are represented, 1 Cor. vi. 9—11, namely, Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, drunkards, &c.; but, it is said, they are washed, but they are sanctified, but they are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Now when the souls of the saints here on earth are raised to such divine contemplations, what transporting satisfaction and delight must arise from the surprising union and harmony of the attributes of the blessed God in these his transactions! And especially when the soul, in the lively exercise of grace and view of its own pardon, justification, and restored holiness, looks upon itself as one of these happy favourites of the Majesty of heaven, it cries out as it were in holy amazement, What a divine profusion is here of wisdom and power, glory and grace, to save a wretched worm from everlasting burnings, and to advance a worthless rebel to such undeserved and exalted glories!

SECTION V.

The wonders of divine perfections united in the success of the gospel give an ecstasy of joy sometimes to holy souls. Not only do these views of the united perfections of God, as they are concerned in the contrivance of the gospel, entertain the saints above with new and pleasurable contemplation, but the wonders of divine wisdom, power, and grace, united and harmonizing in the propagation and success of this gospel, become a matter of delightful attention and survey to the saints on high.

This is imitated also in a measure by the children of God here on earth. Have you never felt such a surprising pleasure in the view of the attributes of God, his grace, wisdom, and power, in making these divine designs so happily efficacious for the good of thousands of souls? If there be joy in heaven among the angels of God at the conversion of a sinner, what perpetual messages of unknown satisfaction and delight did the daily and constant labours of the blessed apostle Paul send to the upper world? What perpetual tidings were carried to the worlds on high of

such and such souls, converted unto God from gross idolatry, from the worship of dumb idols, from the vain superstition of their heroes and mediator-gods, and from the impure and bloody sacrifices of their own countrymen, whereby they intended to satisfy their gods for their own iniquities, and to reconcile themselves to these invented gods, these demons or devils which were deified by the folly and madness of sinful men! What new hallelujahs must it put into the mouths of the saints and angels on high, to see the true and living God worshipped by thousands that had never before known him, and to see Jesus the Mediator in all the glories of his divine offices, admired and adored by those who lately had either known nothing of him, or been shameful revilers and blasphemers of his majesty.

And what an unknown delight is diffused through many of the saints of God now here on earth upon such tidings, not only from the foreign and heathen countries, but even some that have professed Christianity, but under gross mistakes and miserable fogs of darkness and superstition! What an inconceivable and overwhelming pleasure has surprised a Christian sometimes in the midst of his zealous worship of God and his Saviour, to hear of such tidings of new subjects in multitudes submitting themselves to their divine dominion!

And even in our day, whensoever we hear of the work of grace begun by the ministry of the word, awakening a drowsy and lethargic soul from its dangerous sleep on the brink of hell, rousing a negligent and slothful creature from his indolence and carelessness about the things of eternity; or again, in making a heart soft and impressive to the powers of divine grace, which was before hard as the nether mill-stone; and especially when multitudes of these tidings come together from distant places, as of late we have heard from New England, and several of

those plantations, from Scotland and several of her assemblies, what additional scenes of heavenly joy and pleasure have been raised amongst the pious souls, both those who relate and those who hear him.

SECTION VI.

Foretastes of heaven are sometimes derived from the overflowing sense of the love of God let in upon the soul.

The spirits above who are surrounded with this blessedness and this love, and rejoice in the everlasting assurance of it, cannot but be filled with intense joy. What can be a greater foundation of complete blessedness and delight than the immediate sensation and assurance of being beloved by the glorious, and supreme, and the all-sufficient Being, who will never suffer his favourites to want any thing he can bestow upon them to make them happy in perfection and for ever? All creatures are under his present view and immediate command; there is not the least of them can give disturbance to any of the favourites of heaven, who dwell in the midst of their Creator's love; nor is there any creature that can be employed towards the complete happiness of the saints on high, but is for ever under the disposal of that God who has made all things, and it shall be employed upon every just occasion for the display of his love to his saints.

Some have imagined that that perfect satisfaction of soul which arises from a good conscience, speaking peace inwardly in the survey of its sincere desire to please God in all things, and having with uprightness of heart fulfilled its duty, is the supreme delight of heaven; but it is my opinion God has never made the felicity of his creatures to be drawn so entirely out of themselves, or from the spring of their own bosom, as this notion seems to imply. God himself

will be all in all to his creatures; and all their original springs of blessedness as well as being are in him and must be derived from him; it is therefore the overflowing sense of being beloved by a God almighty and eternal, that is the supreme fountain of joy and blessedness to every reasonable nature, and the endless security of this happiness is joy everlasting in all the regions of the blessed above.

Now a taste of this kind is heavenly blessedness even on this earth, where God is pleased to bestow it on his creatures; and the glimpses of it bring such ecstasies into the soul as can hardly be conceived or revealed to others, but it is best felt by them who enjoy it.

SECTION VII.

Foretastes of heaven in the fervent emotions of soul in love to Jesus Christ.

What the love and strong affections of the blessed saints above towards Jesus Christ their Lord and Saviour may impress of joy on their spirits, is not possible for us to learn in the present state; but there are some who have even here on earth felt such transcendent affections to Jesus the Son of God, even though they have never enjoyed the sight of him, yet they love him with most intense and ardent zeal; their devotion almost swallows them up and carries them away captive above all earthly things, and brings them nearer to the heavenly world. There is an unknown joy which arises from such intense love to an object so lovely and so deserving; such is that which is spoken concerning the saints to whom St. Peter wrote, 1 Peter i. 8: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." It is through this divine taste of love, and joy, and glory communicated by the blessed Spirit, revealing

the things of Christ to their souls, that many of the confessors and martyrs in the primitive ages, and in latter times, have not only joyfully parted with all their possessions and their comforts in this life, but have followed the call of God through prisons and deaths of a most dreadful kind, through racks and fires, and many torments, for the sake of the love of Jesus; and perhaps there may be some in our day who have had so lively and strong a sensation of the love of Christ let in upon their souls, that they could not only be content to be absent from all their carnal delights for ever, but even from their intellectual and more spiritual entertainments, if they might be for ever placed in such a situation to Jesus Christ, as to feel the everlasting beams of his love let out upon them, and to rejoice in him with perpetual delight. As he is the nearest image of God the Father, they can love nothing beneath God equal to their love of him, nor delight in any thing beneath God equal to their delight in Jesus Christ; indeed their love and their joy are so wrapped up in the great and blessed God as he appears in Christ Jesus, that they do not usually divide their affections in this matter, but love God supremely for ever, as revealing himself in his most perfect love in Christ Jesus unto their souls. How near this may approach to the glorified love of the saints in heaven, or what difference there is between the holy ones above and the saints below, in this respect, may be hard to say.

SECTION VIII.

Foretastes of heaven in the transcendent love of the saints to each other. I might here ask some advanced saints,

Have you never seen or heard of a fellow Christian growing into such a near resemblance to the blessed Jesus, in all the virtues and graces of the

Spirit, that you would willingly part with all the attainments and honours that you have already arrived at, which make you never so eminent in the world or in the church, as to be made so near a conformist to the image of the blessed Jesus as this fellow Christian has seemed to be?

Have you never seen or read of the glories and graces of the Son of God exemplified in some of the saints in so high a degree, and at the same time been so divested of self, and so mortified to a narrow self-love, as to be satisfied with the lowest and the meanest supports of life, and the meanest station in the church of Christ here on earth, if you might but be favoured to partake of that transcendent likeness to the holy Jesus, as you would fain imitate and possess?

Have you never had a view of all the virtues and graces of the saints, derived from one eternal fountain, the blessed God, and flowing through the mediation of Jesus his Son in so glorious a manner, that you have longed for the day when you shall be amongst them, and receive your share of this blessedness? Have you never found yourself so united to them in one heart and one soul, that you have wished them all the same blessings that you have wished to yourself, and that without the least shadow of grudging or envy, if every one of them were partaker as much as you? There is no envy among the heavenly inhabitants; nor doth St. Paul receive the less because Cephas or Apollos has a large share. Every vessel has its capacity enlarged to a proper extent by the God of nature and grace, and every vessel is completely filled, and feels itself for ever full and for ever happy; then there cannot be found the shadow of envy amongst them.

Now to sum up the view of these things in short: who is there that enjoys these blessed evidences of an interest in the inheritance on high, who is there

that has any such foretastes of the felicity above, but must join with the whole creation in groaning for that great day, when all the children of God shall appear in the splendour of their adoption, and every thing in nature and grace among them shall attain the proper end for which it was at first designed? And whensoever any such Christian hears some of the last words in the Bible pronounced by our Lord Jesus, "Surely I come quickly," he must immediately join the universal echo of the saints with unspeakable delight, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

DISCOURSE XI.

SAFETY IN THE GRAVE AND JOY AT THE RESURRECTION.

JOB XIV. 13, 14, 15.

Oh that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call; and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.

BEFORE we attempt to make any improvement of these words of Job for our present edification, it is necessary that we search out the true meaning of them. There are two general senses of these three verses, which are given by some of the most considerable interpreters of scripture, and they are exceeding different from each other.

The first is this. Some suppose Job under the extremity of his anguish to long after death here, as he does in some other parts of this book, and to desire that God would cut him off from the land of the living, and hide him in the grave, or, at least, take him away from the present stage of action, and conceal him in some retired and solitary place, dark

as the grave is, till all the days which might be designed for his pain and sorrow were finished; and that God would appoint him a time for his restoration to health and happiness again in this world, and raise him to the possession of it, by calling him out of that dark and solitary place of retreat; and then Job would answer him, and appear with pleasure at such a call of providence.

Others give this sense of the words, that though the pressing and overwhelming sorrows of this good man constrained him to long for death, and he entreated God that he might be sent to the grave as a hiding-place, and thus be delivered from his present calamities, yet he had some divine glimpse of a resurrection or living again, and he hopes for the happiness of a future state when God should call him out of the grave. He knew that the blessed God would have a desire to restore the work of his own hands to life again, and Job would answer the call of his God into a resurrection with holy pleasure and joy.

Now there are four or five reasons which incline me to prefer this latter sense of the words, and to show that the comforts and hope which Job aspires to in this place, are only to be derived from a resurrection to final happiness.

1. The express words of the text are, "O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave!" not in a darksome place like the grave; and where the literal sense of the words is plain and agreeable to the context, there is no need of making metaphors to explain them. There is nothing that can encourage us to suppose that Job had any hope of happiness in this world again, after he was gone down to the grave, and therefore he would not make so unreasonable a petition to the great God. This seems to be too foolish and too hopeless a request for us to put into the mouth of so wise and good a man.

2. He seems to limit the continuance of man in the state of death to the duration of the heavens, ver. 12th: "Man lieth down and riseth not till the heavens be no more:" not absolutely for ever does Job desire to be hidden in the grave, but till the dissolution of all these visible things, these heavens and this earth, and the great rising-day for the sons of men. These words seem to have a plain aspect towards the resurrection.

And especially when he adds, "They shall not be wakened nor raised out of their sleep." The brutes when dying are never said to sleep in scripture, because they shall never rise again; but this is a frequent word used to signify the death of man both in the Old Testament and in the New, because he only lies down in the grave for a season, as in a bed of sleep, in order to awake and arise hereafter.

3. In other places of this book, Job gives us some evident hints of his hope of a resurrection, especially that divine passage and prophecy, when he spake as one surrounded with a vision of glory, and filled with the light and joy of faith. Job xix. 25: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me." But in many parts of this book the good man lets us know, that he had no manner of hope of any restoration to health and peace in this life. Job vii. 6, 7, 8: "My days are spent without hope: mine eye shall no more see good: the eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no more: thine eyes are upon me, and I am not." Ver. 21: "Now shall I sleep in the dust, thou shalt seek me in the morning, and I shall not be." Job xvii. 15: "Where is now my hope? As for my hope, who shall see it?" He and his hope seemed to go

down to the bars of the pit together, and to rest in the dust. And if Job had no hope of a restoration in this world, then his hopes must point to the resurrection of the dead.

4. If we turn these verses here, as well as that noble passage in Job xix. to the more evangelical sense of a resurrection, the truths which are contained in the one and the other, are all supported by the language of the New Testament: and the express words of both these texts are much more naturally and easily applied to the evangelical sense, without any strain and difficulty.

The expressions in the xixth of Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," &c., have been rescued by many wise interpreters from that poor and low sense which has been forced upon them, by those who will not allow Job to have any prospect beyond this life: and it has been made to appear to be a bright glimpse of divine light and joy, a ray or vision of the Sun of Righteousness breaking in between the dark clouds of his pressing sorrow: and that the words of my text demand the same sort of interpretation, will appear farther by these short remarks, and this paraphrase on them.

Job had been speaking, ver. 7, &c., that there is hope of a tree when it is cut down, that it will sprout again visibly, and bring forth boughs; but when man gives up the ghost, he is no more visible upon earth: where is he? Job does not deny his future existence, but only intimates that he does not appear in the place where he was; and in the following verses he does not say a dying man shall never rise, or shall never be awakened out of his sleep, but asserts that he riseth not till the dissolution of these heavens and these visible things: and by calling death a sleep, he supposes an awaking time, though it may be distant and far off.

Then he proceeds to long for death, "O that thou

wouldest hide me in the grave! that thou wouldest keep me secret till thy wrath be past!" till these times and seasons of sorrow be ended, which seem to be the effect of Divine wrath or anger: but then I entreat that thou wouldest appoint me a set time for my tarrying in the grave, and remember me, in order to raise me again. Then with a sort of surprise of faith and pleasure, he adds, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Shall these dry bones live? And he answers in the language of hope: "All the days of that appointed time of thine I will wait till that glorious change shall come." Thou shalt call from heaven, and I will answer thee from the dust of death. I will appear at thy call, and say, "Here am I: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thy hands," to raise me again from the dead, whom thou hast made of clay, and fashioned me into life.

From the words thus expounded we may draw these several observations, and make a short reflection upon each of them, as we pass along.

Observation I. This world is a place wherein good men are exposed to great calamities, and they are ready to think the anger or wrath of God, appears in them.

Observation II. The grave is God's known hiding-place for his people.

Observation III. God has appointed a set time in his own counsels for all his children to continue in death.

Observation IV. The lively view of a happy resurrection, and a well-grounded hope of this blessed change, is a solid and divine comfort to the saints of

God, under all trials of every kind both in life and death.

Observation V. The saints of God who are resting in their beds of dust will arise joyfully at the call of their heavenly Father.

Observation VI. God takes delight in his works of nature, but much more when they are dignified and adorned by the operations of divine grace.

Observation VII. How much are we indebted to God for the revelation of the New Testament, which teaches us to find out the blessings which are contained in the Old, and to fetch out the glories and treasures which are concealed there.

Let us dwell awhile upon each of these, and endeavour to improve them by a particular application.

Observation I. This world is a place wherein good men are exposed to great calamities, and they are ready to think the anger or wrath of God appears in them. This mortal life and this present state of things as surrounded with crosses and disappointments, the loss of our dearest friends, as well as our own pains and sicknesses, have so much anguish and misery attending them, that they seem to be the seasons of Divine wrath, and they grieve and pain the spirit of many a pious man, under a sense of the anger of his God. It must be confessed in general, that misery is the effect of sin, for sin and sorrow came into the world together. It is granted also, that God sometimes afflicts his people in anger, and corrects them in his hot displeasure, when they have sinned against him in a remarkable manner: but this is not always the case.

The great God was not really angry with Job when he suffered him to fall into such complicated distresses; for it is plain, that while he delivered him up into the hands of Satan to be afflicted, he vindicates and honours him with a divine testimony concerning his piety. Job i. 8: "There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil." Nor was he angry with his Son Jesus Christ, when it pleased the Father to bruise him and put him to grief, when he made his soul an offering for sin, and he was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted, Isa. liii. To these we may add Paul, the best of the apostles, and the greatest of Christians, who was abundant in labours and sufferings beyond all the rest. See a dismal catalogue of his calamities, 2 Cor. xi. 23, &c. What variety of wretchedness, what terrible persecutions from men, what repeated strokes of distress came upon him by the providence of God, which appeared like the effects of divine wrath or anger! but they were plainly designed for more divine and blessed purposes, both with regard to God, with regard to himself, and to all the succeeding ages of the Christian church.

God does not always smite his own people to punish sin and show his anger; but these sufferings are often appointed for the trial of their Christian virtues and graces, for the exercise of their humility and their patience, for the proof of their steadfastness in religion, for the honour of the grace of God in them, and for the increase of their own future weight of glory. "Blessed is the man that endures temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." James i. 12. "The devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Rev. ii.

10. "Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." 2 Cor. iv. 17.

However, upon the whole, this world is a very troublesome and painful place to the children of God: they are subject here to many weaknesses and sins, temptations and follies; they are in danger of new defilements; they go through many threatening perils, and many real sorrows, which either are the effects of the displeasure of God, or, at least, carry an appearance of Divine anger in them: but there is a time when these shall be finished, and sorrow shall have its last period: there is a time when these calamities will be overpast, and shall return no more for ever.

Reflection. Why then, O my soul, why shouldest thou be so fond of dwelling in this present world? Why shouldest thou be desirous of a long continuance in it? Hast thou never found sorrows and afflictions enough among the scenes of life, to make thee weary of them? and when sorrow and sin have joined together, have they not grievously imbittered this life unto thee? Wilt thou never be weaned from these sensible scenes of flesh and blood? Hast thou such a love to the darknesses, the defilements, and the uneasinesses which are found in such a prison as this is, as to make thee unwilling to depart when God shall call? Hast thou dwelt so long in this tabernacle of clay, and dost thou not groan, being burdened? Hast thou no desire to a release into that upper and better world, where sorrows, sins, and temptations, have no place, and where there shall never be the least appearance or suspicion of the displeasure of thy God towards thee?

Observation II. The grave is God's known hiding-place for his people: It is his appointed shelter and retreat for his favourites, when he finds them

overpressed either with present dangers or calamities, or when he foresees huge calamities and dangers, like storms and billows, ready to overtake them. Isa. lvii. 1: "The righteous is taken away from the evil to come." God our heavenly Father beholds this evil advancing forward through all the present smiles of nature, and all the peaceful circumstances that surround us. He hides his children in the grave from a thousand sins, and sorrows, and distresses of this life, which they foresaw not: and even when they are actually beset behind and before, so that there seems to be no natural way for their escape, God calls them aside into the chambers of death in the same sort of language as he uses in another case, Isa. xxvi. 20: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee, hide thyself as it were for a little moment till the indignation be overpast."

And yet perhaps it is possible that this very language of the Lord in Isaiah may refer to the grave, as God's hiding-place, for the verse before promises a resurrection: "Thy dead men shall live; together with my dead body shall they arise: awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." And if we may suppose this last verse to have been transposed by any ancient transcribers, so as to have followed originally verse 20, or 21, it is very natural then to interpret the whole paragraph concerning death, as God's hiding-place for his people, and their rising again through the virtue of the resurrection of Christ as their joyful release.

Many a time God is pleased to shorten the labours and travels, and fatigues of good men in this wilderness, and he opens a door of rest to them where he pleases, and perhaps surprises them into a state of safety and peace, "where the weary are at rest, and the wicked cease from troubling;" and holy Job seems to desire this favour from his Maker here.

Sometimes, indeed, in the history of this book, he seems to break out into these desires in too rude and angry a manner of expression; and in a fit of criminal impatience he murmurs against God for upholding him in the land of the living: but at other times, as in this text, he represents his desires with more decency and submission. Every desire to die is not to be construed sinful and criminal. Nature may ask of God a relief from its agonies and a period to its sorrows; nor does grace utterly forbid it, if there be also an humble submission and resignation to the will of God, such as we find exemplified by our blessed Saviour? "Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as thou wilt."

On this second observation I desire to make these three reflections:—

Reflection 1. Though a good man knows that death was originally appointed as a curse for sin, yet his faith can trust God to turn that curse into a blessing: he can humbly ask his Maker to release him from the painful bonds of life, to hasten the slow approaches of death, and to hide him in the grave from some overwhelming sorrows. This is the glory of God in his covenant of grace with the children of men, that he turns curses into blessings, Deut. xxiii. 5. And the grave, which was designed as a prison for sinners, is become a place of shelter to the saints, where they are hidden and secured from rising sorrows and calamities. It is God's known hiding-place for his own children from the envy and the rage of men, from all the known and unknown agonies of nature, the diseases of the flesh, and the distresses of human life, which perhaps might be overbearing and intolerable.

Why, O my fearful soul, why shouldest thou be afraid of dying? Why shouldest thou be frighted at the dark shadows of the grave, when thou art weary

with the toils and crosses of the day? Hast thou not often desired the shadow of the evening, and longed for the bed of natural sleep, where thy fatigues and thy sorrows may be forgotten for a season? And is not the grave itself a sweet sleeping-place for the saints, wherein they lie down and forget their distresses, and feel none of the miseries of human life, and especially since it is softened and sanctified by the Son of God lying down there? Why shouldest thou be afraid to lay thy head in the dust? It is but entering into God's hiding-place, into his chambers of rest and repose: it is but committing thy flesh, the meaner part of thy composition, to his care in the dark for a short season: he will hide thee there, and keep thee in safety from the dreadful trials which perhaps would overwhelm thy spirit. Sometimes in the course of his providence he may find it necessary, that some spreading calamity should overtake the place where thou dwellest, or some distressing stroke fall upon thy family, or thy friends, but he will hide thee under ground before it comes, and thus disappoint all thy fears, and lay every perplexing thought into rest and silence.

Reflection 2. Let it be ever remembered, that the grave is God's hiding-place, and not our own: we are to venture into it without terror when he calls us; but he does not suffer us to break into it our own way, without his call. Death and life are in the hands of God, and he never gave the keys of them to mortal men, to let themselves out of this world when they please, nor to enter into his hiding-place without his leave.

Bear up then, O my soul, under all the sorrows and trials of this present state, till God himself shall say, "It is finished;" till our blessed Jesus, who has the keys put into his hands, shall open the door of death, and give thee an entrance into that dark and

peaceful retreat. It is a safe and silent refuge from the bustle and the noise, the labours and the troubles of life; but he that forces it open with his own hands, how will he dare to appear before God in the world of spirits? What will he answer, when, with a dreadful frown, the great God shall demand of him, "Friend, how camest thou in hither?" Who sent for thee, or gave thee leave to come? Such a wretch must venture upon so rash an action at the peril of the wrath of God, and his own eternal destruction.

Our blessed Jesus, who has all the vast scheme of divine counsels before his eyes, by having the books of his Father's decrees put into his hands, he knows how long it is proper for thee, O Christian, to fight and labour, to wrestle and strive with sins, temptations, and difficulties, in the present life: he knows best in what moment to put a period to them, and to pronounce thee conqueror. Fly not from the field of battle for want of holy fortitude, though thy enemies and thy dangers be never so many, nor dare to dismiss thyself from thy appointed post, till the Lord of life pronounce the word of thy dismission.

Sometimes I have been ready to say within myself, Why is my life prolonged in sorrow? Why are my days lengthened out to see farther wretchedness? Methinks the grave should be ready for me, and the house appointed for all the living. What can I do farther for God or for man here on earth, since my nature pines away with painful sickness, my nerves are unstrung, my spirits dissipated, and my best powers of acting are enfeebled and almost lost? Peace, peace, O thou complaining spirit; dost thou know the counsels of the Almighty, and the secret designs of thy God and thy Saviour? He has many deep and unknown purposes in continuing his children amidst heavy sorrows, which they can never penetrate

or learn in this world. Silence and submission becomes thee at all times. "Father, not my will, but thine be done."

And let it be hinted to thee, O my soul, that it is much more honourable to be weary of this life, because of the sins and temptations of it, than because of the toils and sorrows that attend it. If we must groan in this tabernacle being burdened, let the snares, and the dangers, and the defilements of it be the chief springs of thy groaning and the warmest motives to request a release. God loves to see his people more afraid of sin than of sorrow. If thy corruptions are so strong, and the temptations of life so unhappily surround thee, that thou art daily crying out, "Who shall deliver thee from the body of sin and death," then thou mayest more honourably send up a wish to heaven, "O that I had the wings of a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest!" O that God would hide me in the grave from my prevailing iniquities, and from the ruffling and disquieting influence of my own follies and my daily temptations! But never be thou quite weary of doing or suffering the will of thy heavenly Father, though he should continue thee in this mortal life a length of years beyond thy desires, and should withhold thee from his secret place of retreat and rest.

A constant and joyful readiness at the call of God to depart hence, with a cheerful patience to continue here during his pleasure, is the most perfect and blessed temper that a Christian can arrive at; it gives God the highest glory, and keeps the soul in the sweetest peace.

Reflection 3. This one thought, that the grave is God's hiding-place, should compose our spirits to silence, and abate our mourning for the loss of friends, who have given sufficient evidence that they are the children of God. Their heavenly Father has seized them from the midst of their trials, dangers, and

difficulties, and given them a secure refuge in his own appointed place of rest and safety. Jesus has opened the door of the grave with his golden key, and has let them into a chamber of repose: he has concealed them in a silent retreat, where temptation and sin cannot reach them, and where anguish and misery can never come.

When therefore I have lost a dear and delightful relative or friend, or perhaps many of them in a short season are called successively down to the dust, let me say thus within myself, "It is their God and my God has done it: he saw what new temptations were ready to surround them in the circumstances of life wherein they stood; he beheld the trials and difficulties that were ready to encompass them on all sides, and his love made a way for their escape: he opened the dark retreat of death, and hid them there from a thousand perils which might have plunged them into guilt and defilement: he beheld this as the proper season to give them a release from a world of labour and toil, vanity and vexation, sin and sorrow: they are taken away from the evil to come, and I will learn to complain no more. The blessed Jesus to whom they had devoted themselves, well knew what allurements of gaiety and joy might have been too prevalent over them, and he gave them a kind escape, lest their souls should suffer any real detriment, lest their strict profession of piety should be soiled or dishonoured: he knew how much they were able to bear, and he would lay upon them no farther burden: he saw rising difficulties approaching, and new perils coming upon them beyond their strength, and he fulfils his own promises, and glorifies his own faithfulness, by opening the door of his well known hiding-place, and giving them a safe refuge there. He keeps them there in secret from the corruptions of a public life, and the multiplied danger of a degenerate age, which might have divided their

hearts from God and things heavenly: and perhaps he guards them also in that dark retreat from some long and languishing sickness, some unknown distress, some over-bearing flood of misery, which was like to come upon them, had they continued longer on the stage of life.

"Let this silence thy murmuring thoughts, O my soul; let this dry up thy tears which are ready to overflow on such an occasion. Dare not pronounce it a stroke of anger from the hand of God who divided them from the tempting or the distressing scenes of this world, and kindly removed them out of the way of danger. This was the wisest method of his love to guard them from many a folly and many a sorrow which he foresaw just at the door."

Will the wounded and complaining heart go on to groan and murmur still, "But my son was carried off in the prime of life, or my daughter in her blooming years: they stood flourishing in the vigour of their nature, and it was my delight to behold their growing appearances of virtue and goodness, and that in the midst of ease, and plenty, and prospects of happiness, so far as this world can afford it!"

But could you look through the next year to the end of it? Could you penetrate into future events, and survey the scenes of seven years to come? Could your heart assure itself of the real possession of this imaginary view of happiness and peace? Perhaps the blessed God saw the clouds gathering afar off, and at a great distance of time, and in much kindness he housed your favourite from unknown trials, dangers, and sorrows. So a prudent gardener, who is acquainted with the sky, and skilful in the signs of the seasons even in the month of May, foresees a heavy tempest rising in the edge of the horizon, while a vulgar eye observes nothing but sunshine; and he who knows the worth and the

tenderness of some special plants in his garden, houses them in haste, lest they be exposed and demolished by the sweeping rain or hail.

You say, "These children were in the bloom of life and in the most desirable appearance of joy and satisfaction." But is not that also usually the most dangerous season of life and the hour of most powerful temptation? Was not that the time when their passions might have been too hard for them, and the deluding pleasures of life stood round them with a most perilous assault? And what if God, out of pure compassion, saw it necessary to hide them from an army of perils at once, and to carry them off the stage of life with more purity and honour? Surely when the great God has appointed it, when the blessed Jesus has done it, we would not rise up in opposition, and say, "But I would have had them live longer here at all adventures: I wish they were alive again, let the consequence be what it will." This is not the voice of faith or patience; this is not the language of holy submission and love to God, nor can our souls approve of such irregular storms of ungoverned affection, which oppose themselves to the Divine will, and ruffle the soul with criminal disquietude.

There are many, even of the children of God, who had left a more unblemished and a more honourable character behind them if they had died much sooner. The latter end of life hath sometimes sullied their brightness, and tarnished the glory they had acquired in a hopeful youth: their growing years have fallen under such temptations, and been defiled and disgraced by such failings, as would have been entirely prevented had they been summoned away into God's hiding-place some years before. Our blessed Jesus walks among the roses and lilies in the garden of his church, and when he sees a wintry storm coming upon some tender plants of righteousness, he hides

them in the earth to preserve life in them, that they may bloom with new glories when they shall be raised from that bed. The blessed God acts like a tender Father, and consults the safety and the honour of his children when the hand of his mercy snatches them away before that powerful temptation comes, which he foresees would have defiled and distressed and almost destroyed them. They are not lost, but they are gone to rest a little sooner than we are. Peace be to that bed of dust where they are hidden, by the hand of their God, from unknown dangers! Blessed be our Lord Jesus, who has the keys of the grave and never opens it for his favourites but in the wisest season!

Observation III. God has appointed a set time in his own counsels for all his children to continue in death: those whom he has hidden in the grave he remembers they lie there, and he will not suffer them to abide in the dust for ever. When Job entreats of God that he may be hidden from his sorrows in the dust of death, he requests also that God would appoint a set time for his release and remember him. His faith seems to have had a glimpse of the blessed resurrection. Our senses and our carnal passions would cry out, where is Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the rest of the ancient worthies, who have been long sleepers in their beds of repose for many thousand years? But faith assures us, that God numbers the days and the months of their concealment under ground, he knows where their dust lies, and where to find every scattered atom against the great restoring day. They are unseen indeed and forgotten of men, but they are under the eye and the keeping of the blessed God: he watches over their sleeping dust, and while the world has forgotten and lost even their names, they are every moment under the

eye of God, for they stand written in his book of life with the name of the Lamb at the head of them.

Jesus, his Son, had but three days appointed him to dwell in this hiding-place, and he rose again at the appointed hour. Other good men, who were gone to their graves not long before him, arose again at the resurrection of Christ, and made a visit to many in Jerusalem: their appointed hiding-place was but for a short season; and all the children of God shall be remembered in their proper seasons, in faithfulness to his Son to whom he has given them: the Head is raised to the mansions of glory, and the members must not for ever lie in dust.

Reflection. Then let all the saints of God wait with patience for the appointed time when he will call them down to death, and let them lie down in their secret beds of repose, and in a waiting frame commit their dust to his care till the resurrection. "All the days of my appointed time," says Job, "I will wait till my change come." The word appointed time is supposed to signify warfare in the Hebrew: as a sentinel, when he is fixed to his post by his general, he waits there till he has orders for a release. And this clause of the verse may refer either to dying or rising again, for either of them is a very great and important change, passing upon human nature, whether from life to death, or from death to life.

It is said by the prophet Isaiah, ch. xxviii. 16, "He that believeth shall not make haste," that is, he that trusts in the wisdom and the promised mercy of God, will not be too urgent or importunate in any of his desires: it is for want of faith that nature sometimes is in too much haste to die, as Job in some of his expressions appears to have been, or as Elijah perhaps discovered himself, when he was wandering in the wilderness, disconsolate and almost despairing

or as the prophet Jeremiah sufficiently manifested, when he cursed the day of his birth, or as Jonah was, that peevish prophet, when he was angry with God for not taking away his life; but the ground of it was, he was vexed because God did not destroy Nineveh according to his prophecy: these are certain blemishes of the children of God left upon record in his word, to give us warning of our danger of impatience, and to guard us against their sins and follies. And since we know that God has appointed the seasons of our entrance into death, and into the state of the resurrection, we should humbly commit the disposal of ourselves to the hand of our God, who will bestow upon us the most needful blessings in the most proper season.

Do not the spirits of the just made perfect wait in patience for the great and blessed rising-day which God has appointed, and for the illustrious change of their bodies from corruption and darkness to light, and life, and glory? God has promised it, and that suffices, and supports their waiting spirits, though they know not the hour. The Father keeps that in his own hand, and perhaps reveals it to none but his Son Jesus, who is exalted to be the Governor and Judge of the world. There are millions of souls waiting in that separate state for the accomplishment of these last and best promises, ready to shout and rejoice when they shall see and feel that bright morning dawning upon them.

Wait therefore, O my soul, as becomes a child of God in the wilderness, among many trials, darknesses, and distresses. He has stripped thee perhaps of one comfort after another, and thy friends and dear relatives in succession are called down to the dust: they are released from their conflicts, and are placed far out of the reach of every temptation; and it is not thy business to prescribe to God at what hour he shall release thee also. Whensoever he is pleased

to call thee to lay down thy flesh in the dust, and to enter into God's hiding-place, meet thou the summons with holy courage, satisfaction, and joy, enter into the chamber of rest, till all the days of sin, sorrow, and wretchedness are overpast: lie down there in a waiting frame, and commit thy flesh to his care and keeping, till the hour in which he has appointed thy glorious change.

Observation IV. The lively view of a happy resurrection, and a well-grounded hope of this blessed change, is a solid and divine comfort to the saints of God, under all trials of every kind, both in life and death. The faith and hope of a joyful rising-day has supported the children of God under long distresses and huge agonies of sorrow which they sustain here. It is the expectation of this desirable day that animates the soul with vigour and life to fulfil every painful and dangerous duty. It is for this we expose ourselves to the bitter reproaches and persecutions of the wicked world; it is for this that we conflict with all our adversaries on earth, and all the powers of darkness that are sent from hell to annoy us; it is this joyful expectation that bears up our spirits under every present burden and calamity of life.

What could we do in such a painful and dying world, or how could we bear with patience the long fatigues of such a wretched life, if we had no hope of rising again from the dead? Surely we are the most miserable of all men in days of public persecution, if we had hope only in this life, 1 Cor. xv. 19. It is for this that we labour, and suffer, and endure whatsoever our heavenly Father is pleased to lay upon us. It is this confirms our fortitude, and makes us "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord," 1 Cor. xv. 58. It is

this that enables us to bear the loss of our dearest friends with patience and hope, and assuages the smart of our sharpest sorrows; for since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so we rejoice in hope that they which sleep in Jesus shall be brought with him at his return, and shall appear in brighter and more glorious circumstances than ever our eyes were blessed with here on earth, 1 Thess. iv. 13. This teaches us to triumph over death and the grave in divine language, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

Reflection. What are thy chief burdens, O my soul? Whence are all thy sighs and thy daily groanings? What are thy distresses of flesh or spirit? Summon them all in one view, and see whether there be not power and glory enough in a resurrection to conquer and silence them all, and to put thy present sorrows to flight?

Dost thou dwell in a vexing and persecuting world, amongst oppressions and reproaches? But those who reproach and oppress are but mortal creatures, who shall shortly go down to the dust, and then they shall tyrannize and afflict thee no more; the great rising-day shall change the scene from oppression and reproach to dominion and glory. When they lie down in the grave like beasts of slaughter, death shall feed on them, and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning, when God shall redeem thy soul from the power of the grave. Thy God shall hide thy body from their rage in his own appointed resting-place, and he shall receive thy soul, and keep it secure in his own presence, till that blessed morning break upon this lower creation; then shalt thou arise and shine, for the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

Do the calamities which thou sufferest proceed from the hand of God? Art thou disquieted with daily pain, with sicknesses, and anguish in thy

flesh? Or art thou surrounded with crosses and disappointments in thy outward circumstances? Are thy spirits sunk with many loads of care and pressing perplexities? Canst thou not forget them all in the vision that faith can give thee of the great rising-day? Canst thou not say in the language of faith, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us?" Then the head and the heart shall ache no more, and every circumstance around thee shall be pleasing and joyful for ever.

Or art thou tenderly affected with the loss of pious friends, who have been very dear and desirable? Perhaps thy sensibilities here are too great and painful; they are such indeed as nature is ready to indulge, but are they not more than God requires, or the gospel allows? Do not thy thoughts dwell too much on the gloom and darkness of the grave? O think of that bright hour when every saint shall rise from the dark retreats of death with more complete characters of beauty, holiness, and pleasure than ever this world could show them in! They are not perished, but sent a little before us into God's hiding-place, where, though they lie in dust and darkness, yet they are safe from the dangers and vexations of life; but they shall spring up in the happy moment into immortality, and shall join with thee in a mutual surprise at each other's divine change.

Or dost thou feel the corruptions of thy heart working within thee, and the sins of thy nature restless in their endeavours to bring defilement upon thy soul, and guilt upon thy conscience: go on and maintain the holy warfare against all these rising iniquities! This thy warfare shall not continue long: thou shalt find every one of these sins buried with thee in the grave, but they shall arise to assault thee no more. The saint shall leave every sin behind

him when he breaks out of the dust at the summons of Christ, and thou shalt find no seeds of iniquity in thy body when it is raised from the grave. Holiness to the Lord shall be inscribed upon all thy powers for ever.

Or art thou perplexed, O my soul, at the near prospect of death and all the terrors and dismal appearances that surround it? Art thou afraid to lie down in the cold and noisome grave? Does thy nature shudder at it as a gloomy place of horror? These, indeed, are the prejudices of sense; but the language of faith will tell thee, it is only God's hiding-place where he secures his saints till all the ages of sin and sorrow are overpast. Look forward to the glorious morning when thou shalt rise from the dust among ten thousand of thy fellows, every one in the image of the Son of God, with their bodies formed after the likeness of his glorious body, and rejoicing together with divine satisfaction in the pleasure of this heavenly change. Try whether the meditation of these glories, and the distant prospect of this illustrious day will not scatter all the gloom that hovers round the grave, and vanquish the fiercest appearances of the king of terrors.

What is there, O my soul, among all the miseries thou hast felt, or all that thou fearest, that can sink thy courage, if the faith of a resurrection be but alive and wakeful? But this leads me to

Observation V. The saints of God who are resting in their beds of dust, will arise joyfully at the call of their heavenly Father. "Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee," said holy Job. The command of God creates life, and gives power to the dead to arise and speak. I come, O Lord, I come. When Jesus, the Son of God, as with the trumpet of an archangel shall pronounce the word which he spake to Lazarus, "Arise and come forth," dust and

rottenness shall hear the call from heaven, and the clods of corruption all round the earth shall arise into the form of man: the saints shall appear at once and answer to that divine call, arrayed in a glory like that of angels; an illustrious host of martyrs and confessors for the truth; an army of heroes and valiant sufferers for the name and cause of God and his Son; an innumerable multitude of faithful servants who have finished their work and lay down at rest.

How shall Adam, the father of our race, together with the holy men of his day, be surprised, when they shall awake out of their long sleep of five thousand years? How shall all the saints of the intermediate ages break from their beds of darkness with intense delight? And those who lay down but yesterday in the dust shall start up at once with their early ancestors, and answer to the call of Jesus from one end of time to the other, and from all the ends of the earth. They shall arise together to meet the Lord in the air, that they may be for ever with the Lord.

Never was any voice obeyed with more readiness and joy than the voice or trumpet of the great archangel, summoning all the children of God to awake from their long slumbers, and to leave their dusty beds behind them, with all the seeds of sin and sorrow, which are buried and lost there for ever. Never did any army on earth march with more speed and pleasure, at the sound of the trumpet, to attend their general to a new triumph, than this glorious assembly shall arise to meet their returning Lord, when this last trumpet sounds, and when he shall come the second time in the full glories of his person and his offices, as Lord and Judge of the world, to bring his faithful followers into complete salvation.

Reflection. Whensoever, O my soul, thou feelest any reluctance to obey the summons of death, encourage thy faith, and scatter thy fears, by waiting

for the call of God to a blessed resurrection. Jesus himself lay down in the grave at his Father's command, and he arose with joy at the appointed hour as the head of the new creation, as the first-born from the dead; and he has orders given him by the Father to summon every saint from their graves at the long appointed hour. Because Jesus arose and lives, they shall arise and live also. O may my flesh lie down in the dust with all courage and composure, and rejoice to escape into a place of rest and silence, far away from the noise and tumult, the hurry and bustle of this present life; being well assured that the next sound which shall be heard is the voice of the Son of God, "Arise, ye dead!" Make haste then, O blessed Jesus, and finish thy divine work here on earth: I lay down my head to sleep in the dust, waiting for thy call to awake in the morning.

Observation VI. God takes delight in his works of nature, but much more when they are dignified and adorned by the operations of divine grace. "Thou wilt have a desire," saith the good man in my text, "to the work of thy own hands." Thou hast moulded me and fashioned me at first by thy power, thou hast new-created me by thy Spirit, and though thou hidest me for a season in one of thy secret chambers of death, thou wilt raise me again to light and life, and in my flesh shall I see God.

When the Almighty had created this visible world, he surveyed his works on the seventh day, and pronounced them all good, and he took delight in them all before sin entered and defiled them: and when he has delivered the creatures of his power from the bondage of corruption, and has purged our souls and our bodies from sin and from every evil principle, he will again delight in the sons and daughters of Adam whom he has thus cleansed and refined by his sovereign grace, and has qualified and

adorned them for his own presence: "He will sing and rejoice over them, and rest in his love." Zeph. iii. 17.

He will love to see them with his Son Jesus at their head, diffusing holiness and glory through all his members. Jesus the Redeemer will love to see them round him, for he has bought them with his blood, and they are a treasure too precious to be for ever lost. He will rejoice to behold them rising at his call into a splendour like his own, and they shall be satisfied when they awake from death into his likeness, and appear in the image of his own glorious body, fit heirs for the inheritance of heaven, fit companions for the blessed angels of light, and prepared to dwell for ever with himself.

Reflection. And shall not we who are the work of his hands have a desire to him that made us, to him that redeemed us, to him that has new-created and moulded us into his own likeness? Do we not long to see him? Have we no desire to be with him, even though we should be absent from the body for a season? But much more should we delight to think of being present with the Lord, when our whole natures, body and soul, shall appear as the new workmanship of almighty power; our souls new created in the image of God, and our bodies new born from the dead, into a life of immortality.

Observation VII. The last observation is of a very general nature, and spreads itself through all my text, and that is, How much are we indebted to God for the revelation of the New Testament, which teaches us to find out the blessings which are contained in the Old, and to fetch out the glories and treasures which are concealed there! The writers of the gospel have not only pointed us to the rich mines where these treasures lie, but have brought

forth many of the jewels and set them before us. It is this gospel that brings life and immortality to light by Jesus Christ, 2 Tim. i. 10. It is this gospel that scatters the gloom and darkness which was spread over the face of the grave, and illuminates all the chambers of death. Who could have found out the doctrine of the resurrection contained in that word of grace given to Abraham, "I am thy God," if Jesus, the great Prophet, had not taught us to explain it thus, Matt. xxii. 31: "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living?"

We who have the happiness to live in the days of the Messiah, know more than all the ancient prophets were acquainted with, and understand the word of their prophecies better than they themselves; for "they searched what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, did signify, when it testified before-hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which should follow," 1 Pet. i. 11. But we read all this fairly written in the gospel. Do you think that good David could have explained some of his own Psalms into so divine a sense, or Isaiah given such a bright account of his own words of prophecy as St. Paul has done in several places of the New Testament, where he cites and unfolds them? Could those illustrious ancients have given us such abundant consolation and hope through the scriptures, which they themselves wrote aforetime, as this apostle has done? Rom. xv. 4. Do you think Job could have read us such a lecture on his own expressions in this text, or in that bright prophecy in the xixth chapter, as the very meanest among the ministers of the gospel can do by the help of the New Testament? For in point of clear discoveries of divine truths and graces, the least in the kingdom of the Messiah is greater than John the Baptist and all the prophets, and our blessed Jesus has told us so, Matt. xi. 11, 13. And by the aid and influences of his Spirit we may be

taught yet farther to search into these hidden mines of grace, and bring forth new treasures of glory.

Reflection. Awake, O my soul, and bless the Lord with all thy powers, and give thanks with holy joy for the gospel of his Son Jesus. It is Jesus by his rising from the dead has left a divine light upon the gates of the grave, and scattered much of the darkness that surrounded it. It is the gospel of Christ which casts a glory even upon the bed of death and spreads a brightness upon the graves of the saints in the lively views of a great rising-day. O blessed and surprising prospect of faith! O illustrious scenes of future vision and transport! when the Son of God shall bring forth to public view all his redeemed ones, who had been long hidden in night and dust, and shall present them all to God the Father in his own image, bright, and holy, and unblemished, in the midst of all the splendours of the resurrection? O blessed and joyful voice, when he shall say with divine pleasure, "Here am I, and the children which thou hast given me: we have both passed through the grave, and I have made them all conquerors of death, and vested them with immortality according to thy divine commission? Thine they were, O Father, and thou hast given them into my hands, and behold I have brought them all safe to thy appointed mansions, and I present them before thee without spot or blemish."

And many a parent of a pious household in that day, when they shall see their sons and their daughters around them, all arrayed with the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, shall echo with holy joy to the voice of the blessed Jesus, "Lord, here am I, and the children which thou hast given me." I was afraid, as Job once might be, when his friends suggested this fear; I was afraid that my children had sinned against God, and he had cast them away for their transgression: but I am now convinced, when

he seized them from my sight, he only took them out of the way of temptation and danger, and concealed them for a season in his safe hiding-place: I mourned in the day-time for a lost son or a lost daughter, and in the night my couch was bedewed with my tears: I was scared with midnight dreams on their account, and the visions of the grave terrified me because my children were there: I gave up myself to sorrow for fear of the displeasure of my God both against them and against me: but how unreasonable were these sorrows? how groundless were my fears? how gloriously am I disappointed this blessed morning! I see my dear offspring called out of that long retreat where God had concealed them, and they arise to meet the divine call. I hear them answering with joy to the happy summons. My eyes behold them risen in the image of my God and their God; they are near me, they stand with me, at the right hand of the Judge; now shall we rejoice together in the sentence of eternal blessedness from the lips of my Lord and their Lord, my Redeemer and their Redeemer." Amen.

Among my papers I have found a speech spoken at a grave, which I transcribed almost fifty years ago, and which deserves to be saved from perishing. It was pronounced many years before at the funeral of a pious person, by a minister there present, supposed to be the Rev. Mr. Peter Sterry; and the subject of it being suited to this discourse, I thought it not improper to preserve it here.

Christian friends, though sin be entered into the world, and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned; yet it seems not wholly suitable to our Christian hope, to stand by and see the grave with open mouth take in, and swallow down any part of a precious saint, and not bring some testimony against the devourer. And yet that our witness may be in righteousness, we must first own, acknowledge and accept of that good and serviceableness that is in it.

For through the death and resurrection of our dear Redeemer, death and the grave are become sweetened to us, and sanctified for us: so that as death is but a sleep, the grave through his lying down in it and rising again, is become as a bed of repose to them that are in him, and a safe and quiet hiding-place for his saints till the resurrection.

And in this respect we do for ourselves, and for this our dearly beloved in the Lord accept of thee O grave, and readily deliver up her body to thee; it is a body that hath been weakened and wearied with long afflictions and anguish, we freely give it into thee; receive it, and let it have in thee a quiet rest

from all its labours; for thus we read it written of thee, "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest."

Besides, it is, O grave, a body that hath been sweetly embalmed by a virtuous, pious, peaceable conversation, by several inward openings and outpourings of the Spirit of life, by much patience and meekness, in strong trials and afflictions: receive it, and let it enjoy in thee, what was once deeply impressed on her own heart, and in a due season written out with her own hand, a sabbath in the grave: for thus also we find it recorded of our Lord and her Lord, that he enjoyed the rest of his last sabbath in the grave.

But we know thee, O grave, to be also a devourer, and yet we can freely deliver up the body unto thee. There was in it a contracted corruptibility, dishonour, and weakness; take them as thy proper prey, they belong to thee, and we would not withhold them from thee: freely swallow them up for ever, that they may appear no more.

Yet know, O grave, there is in the body, considered as once united to such a soul, a divine relation to the Lord of life; and this thou must not, thou canst not dissolve or destroy. But know, and even before thee, and over thee be it spoken, that there is a season hastening wherein we shall expect it again from thee in incorruption, honour, and power.

We now sow it into thee in dishonour, but expect it again returned from thee in glory; we now sow it into thee, in weakness, we expect it again in power; we now sow it into thee a natural body, we look for it again from thee a spiritual body.

And when thou hast fulfilled that end for which the Prince of life, who took thee captive, made thee to serve, then shalt thou who hast devoured, be thyself also swallowed up; for thus it is written of thee, "O death, I will be thy plague, O grave, I will be

thy destruction." And then shall we sing over thee what also is written of thee, "O death, where is now thy sting? O grave, where is now thy victory?" Amen.

NOTE. A line or two is altered in this speech, to suit it more to the understanding and the sense of the present age.

DISCOURSE XII.

THE NATURE OF THE PUNISHMENTS IN HELL.

MARK ix. 46.

Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

INTRODUCTION.

THESE words are a short description of hell, by the lips of the Son of God, who came down from heaven: and he who lay in the bosom of his Father, and was intimate in all the counsels of his mercy and justice, must be supposed to know what the terrors and the wrath of God are, as well as his compassion and his goodness.

It is confessed, that a discourse on this dreadful subject is not a direct ministration of grace and the glad tidings of salvation, yet it has a great and happy tendency to the same end, even the salvation of sinful men; for it awakens them to a more piercing sight, and to a more keen sensation of their own guilt and danger; it possesses their spirits with a more lively sense of their misery, it fills them with a holy dread of divine punishment, and excites the powerful passion of fear to make them fly from the wrath to

come, and betake themselves to the grace of God revealed in the gospel.

The blessed Saviour himself, who was the most perfect image of his Father's love, and the prime minister of his grace, publishes more of these terrors to the world, and preaches hell and damnation to sinners more than all the prophets or teachers that ever went before him; and several of the apostles imitate their Lord in this practice: they kindle the flames of hell in their epistles, they thunder through the very hearts and consciences of men with the voice of damnation and eternal misery, to make stupid sinners feel as much of these terrors in the present prospect as is possible, in order to escape the actual sensation of them in time to come.

Such awful discourses are many times also of excellent use to keep the children of God, and the disciples of Jesus, in a holy and watchful frame, and to affright them from returning to sin and folly, and from the indulgence of any temptation, by setting these terrors of the Lord before their eyes. O may these words of his terror, from the lips of one of the meanest of his ministers, be attended with divine power from the convincing and sanctifying Spirit, that they may answer these happy ends and purposes, that they may excite a solemn reverence of the dreadful majesty of God in all our souls, and awaken us to repentance for every sin, and a more watchful course of holiness!

Let us then consider the expression in my text: when our Saviour mentions the word hell, he adds, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched;" in which description we may read the nature of this punishment, and the perpetuity of it.

First, We shall consider the nature of this punishment, as it is represented by the metaphors which our Saviour uses; and if I were to give the most natural and proper sense of this representation, I

would say that our Saviour might borrow this figure of speech from these three considerations.

1. Worms and fire are the two most general ways whereby the bodies of the dead are destroyed; for whether they are buried or not buried, worms devour those who by the custom of their country are not burnt with fire: and perhaps he might refer to the words of Isa. lxvi. 24; where the prophet seems to foretell the punishment of those who will not receive the gospel, when it shall be preached to all nations: "They," says he, (that is, the true Israel, the saints of God, or Christians,) "they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men who have transgressed against me, for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." It is highly probable that this is only a metaphor referring to the punishment of the souls of obstinate unbelievers in hell, for it would be but a very small punishment indeed, if only their dead bodies were devoured by worms or fire, or rather no punishment at all besides a memorial of their sin.

2. Consider, the gnawing of worms and the burning of fire are some of the most smarting and severe torments that a living man can feel in the flesh; therefore the vengeance of God, upon the souls of obstinate sinners, is set forth by it in our Saviour's discourse; and it was probably well known amongst the Jews, as appears by some of the Apocryphal writings, Judith xvi. 17: "Wo to the nation that rises up against my kindred; the Lord Almighty will take vengeance of them in the day of judgment, putting fire and worms in their flesh, and they shall feel them and weep for ever." And Ecclesiasticus vii. 16, 17: "Number not thyself among the multitude of sinners, but remember the wrath will not tarry long. Humble thy soul greatly, for the vengeance of the ungodly is fire and worms."

3. Consider, whether worms feed upon a living man or devour his dead body, still they are such as are bred in his own flesh; but fire is brought by other hands, and applied to the flesh: even so this metaphor of a worm happily represents the inward torments, and the teazing and vexing passions which shall arise in the souls of those unhappy creatures, who are the just objects of this punishment; and it is called their worm, that worm that belongs to them, and is bred within them by the foul vices and diseases of their souls: but the fire which shall never be quenched refers rather to the pains and anguish which come from without, and that chiefly from the hand of God, the righteous avenger of sin, and from his indignation, which is compared to fire.

SECTION I.

The worm that dieth not.

Let us begin with the first of these, namely, the torments which are derived from the gnawing worm, those agonies and uneasy passions which will arise and work in the souls of these wretched creatures, so far as we can collect them from the word of God, from the reason of things, and the working powers of human nature.

When an impenitent sinner is cast into hell, we have abundant reason to suppose, that the evil temper of his soul, and the vicious principles within him are not abated, but his natural powers, and the vices which have tainted them and mingle with them are awakened and enraged into intense activity and exercise, under the first sensations of his dreadful punishment. Let us endeavour to conceive, then, what would be the ferments, the raging passions, and the vexing inward torments of a wicked man seized by the officers of an Almighty Judge, borne away by the executioners of vengeance, and plunged

into a pit of torture and smarting misery, while at the same time he had a most fresh and piercing conviction ever present, that he had brought all this mischief upon himself by his own guilt and folly.

1. The first particular piece of wretchedness, therefore, contained in this metaphor, is the remorse and terrible anguish of conscience which shall never be relieved. How terrible are the racks of a guilty conscience here on earth, which arise from a sense of past sins! How does David cry out and roar under the disquietude of his spirit! Psal. xxii. 3: "While I kept silence," and confessed not mine iniquity, "my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long; day and night thy hand was heavy upon me, and my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." And again, Psal. xxxviii. 4: "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head, as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me." God has wisely so framed the nature and spirit of man, that a reflection on his past misbehaviour should raise such keen anguish at his heart; and thousands have felt it in a dreadful degree, even while they have continued in this world, in the land of life and hope.

But when death has divided the soul from this body, and from all the means of grace, and cut off all the hopes of pardoning mercy for ever, what smart beyond all our thoughts and expressions must the sinner feel from such inward wounds of conscience! and it gives a twinging accent to every sorrow, when the sinner is constrained to cry out, "It is I, it is I who have brought all this upon myself. Life and death were set before me in the world where once I dwelt, but I refused the blessings of eternal life, and the offers of saving grace. I turned my back upon the ways of holiness which led to life, and renounced the tenders of Divine mercy: I chose the paths of sin, and folly, and madness, though

I knew they led to everlasting misery and death. Wretch that I was, to choose those sins and these sorrows, though I knew they were necessarily joined together! I am sent into these regions of misery which I chose for myself, against all the kind admonitions and warnings of God and Christ, of his gospel and his ministers of grace! O these cursed eyes of mine, that led me into the snares of guilt and folly! these cursed hands that practised iniquity with greediness! these cursed lips of mine, which dishonoured my Maker! O these cursed appetites and passions, and this obstinate will, which have wrought my ruin! This cursed body and soul, that have procured their own everlasting wretchedness!" These thoughts will be like a gnawing worm within, which will prey upon the spirit for ever. The fretting smart arising from this vexatious worm must be painful in the highest extreme, when we know it is a worm which will never die, which will for ever hang at our heart, and sting our vitals in the most tender and sensible parts of them without intermission, as well as without end.

Here on earth the stings and scourges of conscience meet with some intervals of relief, from necessary business which employs the mind, from gay company which diverts the heart, from the refreshments of nature by day, or from the sweet repose of the returning night: but in the world to come every hour shall be filled up with these cutting sorrows; for there is no season of refreshment, no diversion of mind, no sleeping there. All things are for ever awake in that world; there are no shadows and darkness to hide us where this torment shall not find us, for it is bred and lives within. There is no couch there to lull the conscience into soft repose, and to permit the sufferer to forget his agonies. Ancient crimes shall rise up and stand for ever before the eyes of the sinner in all their glaring forms, and all

their heinous aggravating circumstances: these will sit heavy upon the spirit with teazing and eternal vexation. O dreadful state of an immortal creature, which must for ever be its own tormentor, and shall know no relief through all the ages of its immortality! Think of this bitter anguish of soul, O sinner, to guard thee from sin in an hour of strong temptation.

II. Another spring of this torment will be the overwhelming sense of an angry God, and utter despair of his love, which is lost for ever. It was the thought of the displeasure of God, which pierced the soul of David with such acute pain, when he remembered his sins, Psal. li. 3, 4: "My sin is ever before me: against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and I have done this evil in thy sight:" and again he pleads with God, Psal. vi. 1: "O Lord, chasten me not in thine anger, nor vex me in thy hot displeasure." He could face a host of armed men without fear, but he could not face an angry God, whose loving-kindness is life, and the loss of whose love is worse than death. Psal. lxxvii. 3: "I remembered God," said he, "and was troubled;" that is, lest he should be favourable no more, and shut up his tender mercies in everlasting anger. This was the terror of that good man, under a deep sense of his crimes, and of God hiding his face from him, and this even while he was in the land of the living, and was not cast out beyond all hope.

But when the grave shuts its mouth on the sinner, and he is thrust out into utter darkness, where the light of God's countenance never shines, nor will shine, how insupportable must such anguish be!

Here in this life perhaps a profane wretch has imagined he could live well enough without God in the world, and was content to have nothing to do with him in a way of worship or dependence here. He determined within himself, that the less he could think of God the better, and so forgot his Maker

days without number: but in those regions of hell, whither the sinner shall be driven, he can never forget an angry God, nor fly out of the reach of his terrors.

"I am now convinced," says he, "but too late, that happiness dwells in his presence, and rivers of pleasure flow at his right hand; but this happiness I shall never see, these streams of pleasure I shall never taste. He is gone for ever with all his love and with all his blessings, God is gone with all his graces and pardons beyond my reach: he stands afar off from my groanings. He told me of it heretofore in the ministry of his word; but, wretch that I was! I would not hearken, I would not believe. I was invited by the Son of his love to receive his gospel, and to partake of forgiving mercy; he stretched out his hands with divine compassion, and offered to receive my soul to his grace, and to wash away my defilements with his own blood; he beseeched me to repent and return to God, and assured me he would secure his Father's favour to me, and a place among the mansions of his glory: but cursed rebel that I was, to despise this salvation, and resist the offers of such love, and to renounce such divine compassion! These offers of mercy are for ever finished, I shall never see him more as surrounded with the blessings of his grace, but as the minister of his Father's justice and the avenger of his abused mercy. There is no other saviour, no other intercessor to procure divine favour for me, and my hopes are overwhelmed and buried in the eternal despair of his love.

III. There will be found also among the damned a constant enmity, and malice, and hatred against the blessed God, which can never satisfy nor ease itself by revenge. It seems very strange indeed that a creature should design revenge against his Maker; but thus it is in these dismal regions of hell;

every wicked man is by nature at enmity with God and in a state of rebellion; and when this enmity is wrought up to malice, under a sense of his punishing hand, then arises that cursed and detestable desire in the soul of revenging itself against its Maker. The fallen angels, those wicked spirits, have found this dismal temper of mind reigning in them; they hate the blessed God with intense malice, because his governing justice sees fit to punish their pride and other iniquities, and they would fain be revenged of him by destroying mankind who were made after his image; their malice cannot reach him in the heights of his glory, but they can reach man his creature, made in his likeness, and they began to take their revenge there nearly six thousand years ago. All the sins, and all the miseries of the sons and daughters of Adam, from the beginning of the world to this day, are owing to this madness of malice, this hatred of God in the hearts of evil angels, who were cast out from heaven and the regions of happiness: they began to exert this malice early, and still they are everlasting tempters of men, in order to avenge themselves upon a righteous God.

But, alas, what a wretched satisfaction must the damned spirits of men propose to themselves in such a wild and extravagant attempt! The very name and mention of this iniquity seems to put our souls and our ears to pain, while we dwell in flesh and blood; but as cursed and hateful a temper as this is, it is the very spirit and temper of apostate angels; and this will be thy temper and thy spirit, O wilful and impenitent sinner, when thou shalt have obstinately sinned thyself into damnation, and canst never deliver thyself from the punishing hand of God.

Think, O my soul, at what a dreadful distance such creatures must be from every glimpse of peace and happiness, whose hearts are filled with such blas-

phemy and rage, and who would be attempting such vain and impious efforts of mingled insolence and madness. Read, O ye foolish and wilful transgressors, read the temper and conduct of devils in their spite and opposition to every thing of God, through all the books of the Old Testament and the New, and remember and think, that such will your temper be when you also shall be banished from the presence of God for your wilful rebellions, as the fallen angels are, and be for ever shut out from all the blessings of his love, and all hope of his favour.

IV. A farther spring of continued torment is such fixed and eternal hardness of heart as will never be softened, such impenitence and obstinacy of soul which will never relent or submit. The hardest sinner here on earth may now and then feel a relenting moment, and the most daring atheist may sometimes have a softening thought come across him, which may perhaps bring a tear into his eyes, and may form a good wish or two in his soul, and wring a groan from his heart which looks like repentance; but when we are dismissed from this body, and this state of trial and of hope, eternal hardness seizes upon the mind: the neck is like an iron sinew hardened more (if I may so express it) in the fire of hell. The will is fixed in everlasting obstinacy against God, and against the glories of his holiness. If Moses and the prophets, if Christ and his apostles in the ministry of the word could not soften the heart of bold transgressors, what can be expected when all the means of grace and the methods of divine compassion are vanished and gone for ever.

It is granted, indeed, there will be bitter repentance among the damned in hell, and inward vexation of soul and self-cursing in abundance, for having plunged themselves into this misery, and having

abandoned all the offers of divine mercy; but it will be only such a repentance as Judas the traitor felt, when he repented and hanged himself: this is a sort of madness of rage within them for having made themselves miserable. But there will be found no hatred of the evil of sin, as it is an offence against God, no painful and relenting sense of their iniquity, as it has dishonoured God and broken his law, no such sorrow for sin as is attended with a hearty aversion to it, and a desire to love God and obey him; but rather they will feel and nourish a growing aversion to God and his holiness.

Ask yourselves, my young friends, Did you never feel your hearts indulging an angry and unrelenting mood, and stubborn in your wrath against a superior who had sharply reproved you? Or have you never felt an obstinate and irreconcilable hour in your younger years, even against a parent who had severely corrected you? Or have you not found, at some seasons, your soul rising and kindling into violent resentment and a revengeful temper against your neighbour upon some supposed affront, damage, or mischief he had done you? Call these unhappy minutes to mind, and learn what hell is: think into what a wretched case you would be plunged, if this wrath and stubbornness, this enmity and hardness should become immortal and unchangeable, though it were but against a neighbour: but if this obstinacy and stubborn hardiness of soul were bent against God himself, so that you would never relent, never sincerely repent of your crimes, nor bow, nor melt, nor yield either to his majesty or his mercy, what would you think of yourselves and of your state? Would you not be wretched and horrible creatures indeed, without the least reason to hope for favour and compassion at his hands? Such is the case, probably, of every damned sinner. Amazing scene of complicated misery and rebellion! a guilty spirit

which cannot repent! a rebellious spirit which cannot submit, even to God himself! a hardened soul that cannot bend nor yield to its Maker! Must not such a wretch be for ever the object of its own inward torment, as well as of divine punishment? O the hopeless and dreadful state of every bold transgressor, that is gone down to death without true repentance; for, sincere and true repentance for having offended God, and ingenuous relentings of heart for sin are never found in those regions of future misery! No kindly meltings of soul towards God are ever known there.

V. There will be also intense sorrow and wild impatience at the loss of present comforts, without any recompense, and without any relief. If this world, O sinful creature, with the riches, or the honours, or the pleasures of it, be all thy chosen happiness, what universal grief and vexation will overspread all the powers of thy nature, when thou shalt be torn away from them all, even from all thy sources of happiness by death, and have nothing come in the room of them, nothing to relieve thy piercing grief, nothing to divert or amuse this vexation, nothing to sooth or ease this eternal pain at the heart?

And yet, farther, when thou shalt be, as the prophet speaks, like a wild bull in a net, struggling and tossing to and fro to free thyself on all sides, when thou shalt be racked with inward fretfulness and impatience, "full of the fury of the Lord" that made thee, and the rebuke of that God that punishes thee, Isa. li. 20. Then shall thy heart, hard as it is in an obstinate course of sin, be ready to burst and break, not with penitence, but madness and over-swelling sorrows: and yet it must not break nor dissolve, but will remain firm and hard for ever to suffer these pangs. This is and must be an eternal heart-ache, for there are no broken hearts in hell in any sense

whatsoever. There the eyes are weeping, and the hands are wringing, and the tongue almost dried with long wailings and outcries, and the teeth gnashing with madness of thought: this is our Saviour's frequent representation of hell, "There shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth;" and yet the heart ever living and ever obstinate to supply fresh springs of these sorrows, and to feel the anguish of them all.

VI. There will be also raging desires of ease and pleasure which shall never be satisfied, together with perpetual disappointment and endless confusion thrown upon all their schemes and their efforts of hope. It is the nature of man, while it continues in being, that it must desire happiness, and make some efforts towards it; and some divines have supposed that men of wicked sensuality and luxury in this world, have so drenched their souls in fleshly appetite by indulging their lusts, and placing their chief satisfaction and happiness therein, that they will carry this very temper of sensuality with them into the world of spirits; and it is possible their raging appetites to this sensual happiness may be increased, while there are no objects to gratify them: now if this be the case, it must be intense and constant misery to feel eternal hunger with no bread to relieve it; keen desire of dainties, with no luxurious dishes to please their humorous taste; eternal thirst without one drop of wine or water to allay or cool it; eternal fatigue and weariness without power to sleep, and eternal lust of pleasure without any hope of gratification.

But if we should suppose these sensualities shall die together with the body, yet this is certain, the soul will have everlasting appetites of its own, that is, the general desire of ease and happiness, and of some satisfying good: but God, who is the only true source of happiness to spirits, the only satisfying por-

tion of souls, is for ever departed and gone; and thus the natural appetite of felicity will be ever wakeful and violent in damned spirits, while every attempt or hope to satisfy it will meet with perpetual disappointment.

Milton, our great English poet, has represented this part of the misery of devils in a beautiful manner. He supposes that ever since they tempted man to sin by the forbidden tree of knowledge, they are once a year changed into the form of serpents and brought by millions into a grove of such trees, with the same golden appearance of fruit upon them; and while with eager appetite they seize those fair appearances to allay their thirst and hunger, instead of fruit they chew nothing but bitter ashes, and reject the hateful taste with spattering noise; and still they repeat their attempts with shameful disappointment, till they are vexed and tormented, and torn with meagre famine, and then are permitted to resume the shape of devils again. And why may we not suppose that the crimes of which the wicked children of men have been guilty in the present life, may be punished with some such kind of pain and confusion, both of body and soul, as is here represented in this poetic emblem or parable?

VII. Another misery of damned creatures is, that vexing envy which arises against the saints in glory, and which shall never be appeased or gratified. The blessed in heaven shall be for ever blessed, and the envy of devils and of damned souls shall never hurt their felicity, nor see their joys diminished. This vile passion of those cursed spirits therefore against the blessed inhabitants of heaven, though it rage never so high, is only preying upon their own hearts, and increasing their own inward anguish.

Let us imagine how many thousand holy souls are arrived safe at paradise, who were surrounded with mean and low circumstances here upon earth, while

their haughty lords, and their rich insolent neighbours, have sinned themselves into hell: and do you think those children of pride can ever bear this sight without envy? How many martyrs have ascended to glory from racks, and tortures, and fires, here upon earth, while their bloody and cruel persecutors have been working out their own damnation by these inhuman acts of murder and cruelty? And will not these wretches, under their righteous sufferings and punishments in hell, envy the creatures whom they have scorned, and oppressed, and murdered here on earth, when they shall see them placed on high seats in the kingdom of heaven, and themselves cast into utter darkness?

And what does all this envy do but increase their own wretchedness? They are distracted with pride and rage to think of these high favours of the blessed God bestowed on creatures, whom they treated once with the utmost disdain: but their envy, like a viper, preys upon their own entrails, and shall never be allayed or made easy: they send a thousand curses up to the heavenly world; but the saints are for ever secured in happiness under the eye of God their heavenly Father, and the care of Jesus, their almighty Friend.

O what a painful plague must this envy be, when with all her envenomed whips and stings she does but scourge and torment the heart where she dwells! What an unspeakable torture must it be to feel this envy so violent and so constant, that it gives itself no ease through everlasting ages! Who is there that dwells in flesh and blood can conceive or express the horror and the twinging agonies that arise from such a hateful passion, fermenting and raging through all the powers of the soul?

VIII. The last thing I shall mention, as part of those punishments of hell which affect the spirit, is a perpetual expectation and dread of new and in-

creasing punishments without end; and it is highly probable that this shall be the portion of multitudes. When the souls of the saints are released by death, and arrive at the blessed regions, they are not vested with all their brightest glories in a moment, nor fixed in the highest point of knowledge and happiness at their first entrance; but as their knowledge and their love increase, so their capacities are enlarged to take in new scenes and new degrees of pleasure, and it is probable that their felicity shall be ever increasing. And in the same manner, it is not unlikely, that the increasing sins, the growing wickedness, and mad rebellion of damned spirits, may bring upon them new judgments and more weighty vengeance. So it was with Pharaoh the Egyptian tyrant, when he remained obstinate and rebellious against the messages of God by Moses, even while he and his nation lay under the smarting scourges of the Almighty: how did his plagues increase with his iniquities! And he may be set before us as an emblem of sinners, and their sufferings, under the wrath of God in hell, as in Rom. ix. 17, 18.

Or perhaps, as the wicked of this world, when they die, have left evil and pernicious examples behind them, or have corrupted the morals of their neighbours by their enticements, or their commands, or by their wicked influence of any kind, so their punishment may be increased in proportion to the lasting effects of their vile example, or their vicious influences. And perhaps, too, there are none among all the ranks of the damned, whose souls will be filled so high with the dread and horror of increasing woes, as lewd and profane writers, profane and immoral princes, or cruel persecutors of religion. Jeroboam the king, not only sinned himself grievously, but who made Israel to sin, as the scripture frequently expresses it with an emphasis, by setting up the idolatry

of calves in the land, 1 Kings xiv. and xv. and xvi. His ghost stood fair for such an increase of torment from age to age, as his idolatry prevailed farther in the land. And all the wanton poets and the vile persecutors, whether of heathen or Christian name, whose writings, whose example, or whose laws have conveyed and propagated their wickedness from age to age after their decease, will be some of these wretched expectants of new and increasing punishment.

Have a care, O ye witty and ye mighty sinners! have a care of setting vile temptations and bad examples before the men of your age! have a care of spreading the contagion of your vices around you by the softness and the force of your allurements! Have a care of establishing iniquity by a law, and propagating loose and wicked opinions, or of encouraging persecution for conscience sake! Take heed lest the cursed influence of your crimes should descend from generation to generation, among the living long after you are dead, and should call for new and sharper strokes from the punishing hand of the Almighty!

But suppose there were nothing else but the long dreadful view of the eternity of their present miseries with an everlasting despair of ease or deliverance, this would add unspeakably to their torment: the constant sensation of what they feel now, and the dread of what they must feel, is sufficient to make their wretchedness intolerable.

If all these springs of misery which I have already mentioned are, and will be found in the souls of damned sinners, there is no need of more to make them exquisitely miserable: and yet since their bodies shall be raised from the dust, in order to be joined with their souls in punishment, as they were united in sin, why may we not suppose that the great God will create bodies for them of such an unhappy mould

and contexture, as shall be another perpetual source of pain and anguish? What if their bodies shall be raised with all the seeds of disease in them, like the gout or the stone, or any more smarting malady? And what if the smart of these bodily distempers should mingle with the raging passions of the mind as far as it is consistent with immortality and everlasting duration? Who can say, that when God exerts his power, and makes his wrath known, in punishing obstinate, rebellious and impenitent sinners, as Rom. ix., he will not frame such bodies for them to dwell in, as shall be a hateful burden, and an incessant plague to them through all ages of their duration? And perhaps these bodily pains may be also included in the metaphor of a gnawing worm bred within them, which shall never die, which shall never cease to fill them with grievous anguish.

Here perhaps it may be inquired, Are there not multitudes of men in this world, who are not sinners of the grosser kind, but have lived in the main, in the practice of common social duties, and have maintained the usual forms of religion, according to the outward rules of the gospel, and the custom of their nation, but they have been negligent indeed of any sincere repentance towards God, and have been strangers to inward vital religion throughout their whole course? Shall these creatures, who seem to stand in a sort of indifferent character, who are outwardly blameless, with regard to common morality, and have exercised the common virtues of justice and benevolence towards their fellow creatures, perhaps under the influences of education or custom, or perhaps by the effect that reason or philosophy, or their inward fears have had toward the restraint of their passions and appetites; I say, shall such sort of creatures as these be filled with those furies of rage and resentment against God, envy and malice toward their fellow-sinners, and all the vile and un-

sociable passions in these regions of misery, which they have never found working in them here on earth, or but in a low degree? Shall all the torments and inward anguish of soul that you have been describing, fall upon this rank of sinners, whom the eye of the world could hardly distinguish from good men, and who were very far from the character of wicked?

I answer, 1st. That however there may seem to be three sorts of persons in our esteem, namely, the good, the bad, and the indifferent, yet the word of God seems to acknowledge but two sorts, namely, "Those who fear God and serve him, and those who fear him not," Mal. iii. 18. Those who have acted from principles of inward religion, or the love of God, and those who had no such principle within them; and therefore the scripture reveals and declares but two sorts of states in the future world, namely, that of rewards and punishments, or that of happiness and misery: and as God the righteous Judge is intimately acquainted with all the secret principles and workings of every heart, he alone knows who have practised virtue sincerely from pious principles, and who have had no such principles within them. He well distinguishes who they are that have complied with the rules of the dispensation under which they have lived, or who have not complied with it: and such as may have the good esteem of men may be highly offensive to God, who knows all things, and may be worthy of his final punishment. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"*

* It has been the opinion of some writers, in elder and in later times, that the vast numbers of indifferent persons, who have neither been evidently holy nor evidently wicked, shall be sent to a new state of trial in another world; but I can find nothing of this doctrine in the Bible, nor any hint of it, unless in that obscure text of St. Peter, 1 Pet. iii. 19, where Christ is said "to go and preach to the

And since he has declared it to be his rule of judgment, that he will reward every one according to their works, and it shall be much more tolerable for some of those creatures than it shall be for others, by reason of their lesser crimes, or their nearer approaches to virtue and piety, so it is certain he will act in perfect justice and equity towards every criminal, and none shall be punished above their demerits, though no impenitent sinner shall go unpunished.

We do not therefore imagine that every condemned criminal shall have the same degree of inward raging passions, the same madness and fury against God and their fellow-creatures, nor the same anguish of conscience as those who have been more grossly and obstinately wicked and vicious, and have wilfully refused and renounced the well-known offers of grace and salvation: there are innumerable degrees of inward punishment and pain, according to the degrees of sin.

Answer 2. It should be added, too, that that world of punishment is also a world of increasing wickedness, and those that have had some natural virtues and some appearances of goodness here, may and will renounce it all in the world to come, where they find themselves punished for their impenitence and irreligion, and their criminal neglect of God and godliness: and the least and lightest of the punishments of damned souls will be terrible enough, and yet not surpass the desert of their offences. They have been all in greater or less degrees treasuring up food for this immortal worm and fuel for this fire, which is unquenchable.

Besides, it may be added here, that in threatenings

spirits" of those sinners who were drowned in the flood of Noah, which may, with truth and justice, be construed to another sense.

the holy scripture generally expresses them in their highest degrees and most formidable appearances, on purpose to secure men from coming near the peril and border of them.

This shall suffice to explain the first part of the metaphor in my text, that is, "The worm that dieth not."

SECTION II.

The fire which shall not be quenched.

I proceed now to consider the second part of the description of hell in the nature of it, as it is represented by our Saviour, and that is, that the fire is never quenched.

Fire signifies the medium or instrument of torture from without, which God has threatened to employ in the punishment of guilty creatures, even as the gnawing worm signifies their inward torment. Fire applied to the sensible and tender parts of the flesh, gives the sharpest pain of any thing that comes within our common notice, and it is used in scripture to signify the punishments of damned sinners, and the wrath of God in the world to come: and perhaps that text is the foundation of it, Isa. xxx., last verse, "Tophet is ordained of old, he has made it deep and large, the pile thereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it." This Tophet was a place in the valley of Hinnom, where children were wont to be burnt in sacrifice to the idol Moloch; and from these Hebrew words, hell in the New Testament is called Gehenna, because of the burning torture and the terrible shrieks of dying children in this valley of Hinnom.

This description of hell by fire is used by our Saviour and his apostles, in their speeches and writings

on this subject. Hell-fire is mentioned six times in six verses where my text lies; the last sentence of judgment passed upon sinners, as it is represented by our Saviour, is expressed in the same language, Matt. xxv. 4: "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." The apostle Paul, speaking of the return of Christ, 2 Thess. i. 8, asserts, that "he shall appear in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel:" and in Rev. xiv. 10, 11, as well as in other parts of this book, the final punishments of sinners is represented by fire and brimstone, as the instruments of their torment.

It is true, indeed, spirits or beings which have no body cannot feel burning by material fire, unless they are united to some sort of material vehicles; but that God will use material fire to punish obstinate and rebellious sinners hereafter at the resurrection, is not improbable, though it is very hard to say with full assurance: since the bodies of the wicked are to be raised again, it is not at all unlikely that their habitation shall be a place of fire, and their bodies may be made immortal to endure the smart and torture without consuming. Did not this God, by his almighty power and mercy, preserve the bodies of Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego in the burning furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, so that the fire had no power to consume or destroy them? And cannot his power do the same thing under the influence of his justice as well as of his mercy? May they not be maintained for ever in their existence to endure the appointed and deserved vengeance? If the blessed God has with much long-suffering borne with these vessels of wrath, under their repeated oppositions to his law and gospel, and they still go on in their vice, obstinacy, and impenitence, and have fitted themselves for destruction, surely he will make his wrath and power known in their punish-

ment, as St. Paul expresses it, Rom. ix.; and when the power and wrath of God unite to punish a creature, how miserable must that creature be!

It is certain, that God has been pleased in his word frequently to make use of fire, brimstone, burning, smoke, darkness, and chains, and every thing that is painful and noisome to nature on earth, in order to represent the miseries that he has prepared for sinners in hell; and we must suppose that all these metaphors, if they are but mere metaphors, carry with them a sense of most intense pain and anguish with which God will afflict the bodies, as well as the spirits of those guilty creatures, who have rebelled against his majesty, rejected his mercy, and exposed themselves to his indignation. But what particular instruments and methods of punishment, what other elements or means of torture the great God will make use of to execute his sentence in this tremendous work, is more than we can now declare, because God has not fully declared it: and I pray God none of us may be ever doomed to learn it by terrible experience. But if there be nothing but fire, the anguish will be intolerable, as one of our poets expresses it,

> In liquid burnings, or on dry, to dwell,
> Is all the sad variety of hell.

Or what if the Almighty, who has all nature, with all its powers, at his command, should employ other material instruments for the execution of his deserved wrath! What if he should choose the alternate extremes of fire and frost, as some have imagined, to torment those impenitent criminals! Or what if the creatures which they have abused to their impious and brutish purposes, should be made instruments and mediums of their punishment! Wine may be rendered a frequent means of sickness, agony, and

pain to the drunkard, and meat and other dainties to the glutton, and gold to the covetous wretches who made gold their god, that they may all remember their crimes in their sufferings. The wisdom of God will execute the sentence of his justice in the most honourable manner.

And after all, if we call away our thoughts from fire, and every material instrument of pain, which the great God may employ in punishing obstinate rebels, and survey only those acute and dreadful impressions of horror and anguish, which a just and holy God may make on sinful spirits in an immediate manner in hell, this would overwhelm our souls with insupportable agonies: "Who knows the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath," says Moses, Psal. xc. Our fears do not rise above those evils which the wrath of God will inflict. Who knows what are those arrows of the Almighty, of which Job speaks, the poison whereof drank up his spirits, and those terrors of God which set themselves in array against him? Who knows what our Saviour felt in the hour of his agony and atonement for our sins, which made him sweat drops of blood? And what sort of terrible impressions God himself may make of his own wrath and vengeance, on the heart of such criminals as wilfully reject his salvation, is beyond our thoughts to conceive, or our language to express.

Thus much shall suffice concerning the metaphor of fire, and the hand of God himself in kindling this fire for the execution of his sentence against impenitents. But since I have entered so far into this subject, I cannot think it proper entirely to finish it, without giving notice of some different and dreadful additions to their torment which will arise from evil angels, and from their companions in sin and misery among the children of men: for in the agonies of

our Saviour, men and devils joined together to afflict him, when it "pleased the Father to bruise him, and to make his soul an offering for our sins."

I. Evil angels, wicked and unclean spirits, with all their furious dispositions and active powers, will increase the misery of the damned. They paved the way to hell for man by the first temptation of our parents in paradise, and they have been ever since busy in tempting the children of men to sin, and they will be hereafter as busy in giving them torment. When these wicked spirits, O sinner, who have taken thee as a willing captive by their baits and devices in this world, when they have led thee down through the paths of vice to the regions of sorrow, they will begin then to insult thee with hateful reproaches, and to triumph over thee with insolence and scorn. When they have deceived thee on earth, to thy own perdition, they will make thee the object of their bitter ridicule and mockery in hell.

O could we turn aside the veil of the invisible world, and hold the bottomless pit open before you, what bitter groans of ghosts would you hear, not only oppressed and agonizing under the wrath of a righteous God, but also under the insults of cruel devils? As there is joy among the angels of heaven when a sinner repents, or when a soul arrives safely at those blessed mansions; so when a rebellious and obstinate criminal is sent down to hell, you would hear the triumphs of those malicious spirits over him, with the voice of insulting pride and hellish joy; and while they domineer over you, and tear you as roaring lions, who seek and tear their prey, you will curse yourselves a thousand times for hearkening to their deceitful allurements. You will vent your rage against yourselves at the same time that they scoff at you as eternal fools who have lost God, and heaven, and immortal happiness, by your

own madness and folly in hearkening to their temptations.

II. The mutual upbraidings of fellow-sinners and fellow-sufferers among the children of men, will aggravate your wretchedness day and night without end. Those who drew each other into foul iniquities, shall fill the ears of each other with loud and sharp reproaches for their mutual influence on both their ruin, and shall charge their damnation, and all their heavy sorrows, as a heavy load on each other's souls. Some of those who have been joined in the nearest ties of kindred and friendship, while they dwelt in flesh and blood, shall be the terrible instruments of their keenest remorse and vexation, and tease their spirits with endless upbraidings.

Here the sons of pride, that most hateful iniquity, shall be overwhelmed with huge mortification and disdain: the mighty sinner shall be insulted by the meanest of the crowd, and princes shall be bearded and affronted by those gay slaves of the court, whom they once employed in flattering and adoring them. They were once vain enough to believe, they were something more than mortal; but now they are spurned by those very flatterers with a foot of contempt, and their eternal pride still swelling, gives their own hearts new stings and twinges at every resentment. None but a proud and haughty creature here in this world, who has sometimes met with scorn and insult from his inferiors, can speak feelingly of the exquisite sensibility of these torments of soul in hell.

But besides this, there are many sinners, who lived in malice, and who died with their hearts full of revenge against their fellow-sinners; and when they shall meet them in those deplorable regions, how natural is it to suppose they will endeavour to execute this revenge upon them without end and without mercy! For it may be easily supposed that

malice, revenge, and cruelty, which are the proper character of devils, shall not be abated among the children of men, when they are grown so near akin in their tempers to those evil spirits, and are now for ever mingled amongst them.

And yet farther, who knows what the damned in hell shall endure from the endless brawls and bitter quarrels among themselves? What new contentions will arise perpetually in such a country, where it is perhaps the practice and custom of the place, and nature of the inhabitants, for the most part, to make every one of their fellows as uneasy and as miserable as they can? O what mad and furious pride, and malice, and every hellish passion, will be raging almost in every bosom against all those who are near them, and this in a dark prison where all are intensely tormented, and where there is no such thing as compassion or sincere love, nothing to sooth each other's sorrows, but every thing that may add to the smart and anguish!

O that the present survey of these horrors of soul, these complicated distresses and miseries from within us and without us, from every quarter of heaven and hell, from the gnawing worm within us, and from the fire of the wrath of God, and the mutual insults, railings, and injuries of men and devils, might all lie with its due weight upon our spirits now, while we are in the land of hope; that every one of us may be awakened to a timely concern about our highest interest, and hasten to make our escape as Lot did from Sodom, lest the sentence of death be pronounced upon us while we delay, and the fiery deluge overtake us.

But here I would tarry a little, to answer a repeated objection, namely, The terror of this outward punishment from the hand of God, which is described by avenging fire is so severe and intolerable, that it awakens some lesser criminals to raise the same cavil

against this unquenchable fire, or God's punishing hand, as was raised before against the never-dying worm, or the inward anguish of soul arising from its own conscience.

It is possible some lesser sinner, who has had more appearances of piety or religion here on earth, may rise and say, You have set the punishments of sin in a most horrible and tremendous light, from this metaphor of fire, as well as from the deathless worm: but surely this cannot be the case, nor these the sufferings which God will inflict on every wretched creature in hell. Are not the punishments there proportioned to the offences? What if these sharpest and deepest tortures and horrors should be the portion of the vilest criminals, the most impious rebels against God, the profane and obstinate abusers of grace, the scoffers at Christ and his gospel, and the cruel persecutors of all the saints, yet will every soul who had not quite religion and holiness enough to reach heaven, be thus terribly tormented in hell? Does not Christ himself tell us, and did you not allow before, that it shall be more tolerable for some sinners than for others? And will there be no easier abodes, no milder regions, no kinder and more favourable appointments, for such as have had many good wishes and hopes, many friendly exercises of virtue towards men, and some workings of imperfect piety towards God?

To this I answer, as before, It is certain that every one shall be judged according to his works, by an unerring rule of equity, and shall be punished according to the aggravation of his iniquities. But dost thou know, O sinner, how great is that punishment which the least transgression against the law of God deserves? One single sin, which thou wilt not part with, will create insufferable misery. And though there may be other criminals there of much more heinous and aggravated guilt, profaneness,

and rebellion than thine is, yet if thy soul be filled with all that torment which one sin may create and deserve, there will be hell enough around thee to make thy distress too terrible for thee to bear.

Besides, let it be remembered, that whatever tendencies toward piety, or appearances of goodness might be found with thee in this world, all these will vanish and be lost, when once thy day of grace is finished, and all the means of grace and salvation are ended for ever. If thou hast refused the proposals of mercy, and continued in thy sins without repentance, and hast never accepted the salvation of Christ while it was offered, all the good that thou seemest to have shall be taken from thee, Matt. xxv. 29; or rather thy heart itself will grow more hard, thy will more obstinate against God, and every evil passion will rise and prevail, and make thee perhaps as very a devil as thy companions in guilt and misery. It is for those who would not part with their beloved sins, which were as dear as right hands, or as right eyes, that the never-dying worm and the unquenchable fire are prepared, as the context itself informs us in this place.

And as the worm of conscience, even for lesser sins, will gnaw thy heart with intense anguish, so the vengeance of divine fire will torment thee with exquisite pain, though thy pain and thy anguish shall not be equal to what greater criminals endure. But it is wise and kind in the blessed God to denounce the terrors and sanctions of his law in their utmost severity, to guard his law the better against every transgression, and to frighten and secure his creatures from sin and punishment.

Trifle not therefore, O sinner, with the means of mercy, and venture not upon little sins, in hope of little misery, nor dare to continue in an impenitent state without God, without Christ and his salvation, upon a foolish presumption that thy sins are but

small, and thy punishment shall be less than others; for the least of those sorrows shall be found greater than any mortal creature can bear, and therefore thou shalt be made immortal to suffer them.

It is granted there are many mansions in hell, as well as in heaven, but as the lowest mansion in heaven is happiness, so the easiest place in hell is misery.

There is another objection rises here, to which it is necessary to give some answer, namely, If the punishments of hell are so intense and terrible, between the worm of conscience, the fire of God's anger, and the malice of evil spirits, surely it will work up human nature into ecstasy and madness; it will take away all the regular exercise of our natural powers; it will render us perhaps mere passive miserable beings, of keen sensations without reasoning. This is certain, that such and so various tortures would have that influence upon our natures at present, and why should it not hereafter? And will the blessed God continue to punish creatures when their reason is lost? What can such punishments avail?

I answer, surely God will not continue to punish madmen; therefore none of these torments shall extinguish our reason, or destroy our intellectual powers; for it is as creatures of reason and free will that sinners are thus punished, and therefore these powers must remain in their proper exercise: besides, the very operations of these powers in self-condemnation, and self-upbraiding, are part of their punishment. But whether God will so fortify the natures of the damned, which probably shall not be made of flesh and blood, and enable them to bear such intense pain without distraction, or whether the highest extremes of their torment shall only be inflicted at some certain periods or intervals, so that they shall soon return to their reasoning powers again, with bitter remembrance of what passed,

this matter is hard to determine; and because it is unwritten and unrevealed, I am silent. But it still remains that punishment shall be so intense and severe, as becomes a God of holiness and justice to inflict on rebellious and obstinate creatures.

SECTION III.

REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURE OF THESE PUNISHMENTS.

It is time now that we should proceed to force some special reflections on the nature of the punishments of hell, such as they have been described in the foregoing discourse.

The first is this: What dreadful and unknown evil is contained in the nature of sin, which grows up into such misery, which breeds this stinging worm in the conscience, which prepares the creature for such fiery torments, and which provokes God to inflict them! The vessels of wrath have prepared themselves for it, as the apostle intimates, by their own sins, Rom. ix. 22, they are fitted for destruction: nor does all the intense and infinite anguish of this punishment exceed the desert of our sins. The great God, in a way of bounty, may often bestow upon us vastly beyond what our little services can ever pretend to have deserved, but he never punishes beyond our deserts.

What a dangerous and pernicious mistake is it in the children of men to sport with sin, as with a harmless thing! It is much safer sporting with a poisonous serpent, or with burning firebrands. The serpent has many gay and pleasing colours on its skin, and appears a very charming creature, which tempts children and fools to play with it: and the same ignorance inclines them sometimes to sport with fire, because of its shining brightness: and till they are burnt with the fire, or bit by the serpent, they will

not forsake their foolish choice, nor be convinced of their danger: such is the case and temper of sinful mortals; their senses indulge the pleasing flatteries of sin, and are fond of its tempting amusements, till they feel the smart of the fire raging in their bosoms, and the adder stings them to death. Thus the wise man describes the flatteries of wine in the view of the drunkard, Prov. xxiii. 31, 32. But the same wise man pronounces every one a fool that makes a mock at sin, or trifles with so formidable a mischief, Prov. xiv. 9.

How vain are the gay fancies of sinful men in the hour of temptation, and how shocking and dreadful will be their disappointment! They think the descriptions of sin, which are blown up and kindled into such terror by the lips of the preacher, are but as mock fire which never burns; but the great day of vengeance which makes haste towards them, will terribly and eternally convince them of the fatal mischief of it by the various plagues that shall seize upon them. The living worm shall gnaw their consciences, and the fire of God will torment their spirits and spread a raging anguish through their whole natures; and every twinging accent of their pain shall teach them, but with a terrible and hopeless conviction, what unspeakable evil is contained in sin. They will then find what a "fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God," who has a right, and power, and will to punish, Heb. x. 31.

O that each of us might arrive at this holy wisdom, to learn the dreadful evil of sin from this Bible, this book of the divine law and grace, and not provoke the blessed God to teach us so necessary a lesson by the rod of his vengeance! O that we could look upon every unlawful action, and particularly every sin against conscience, as the seed of that worm which will gnaw our souls in hell with intense

pain, as part of that fuel which is kindling into a flame to torment our consciences for ever, and that under the powerful influences of these representations of sin, we might fly to the utmost distance from it with horror, and make our safe escape!

Reflection 2. If the punishments of hell, appointed by the blessed God, carry so much terror in them, how much mistaken are the sinful children of men in the ideas which they form of the great and blessed God? This representation of the vengeance of the Lord in hell may be of use to refute such mistaken opinions.

Some have framed a god for themselves; not such as dwells in the heavens, not such as he has described himself in his word, but their vain imagination has raised up an idol made of mere goodness and mercy, without holiness and justice: it is their own self-love which forms this idle and foolish image of the God that made them, because they do not like to think of falling under the terror of his power. They venture to affront him to his face, they dare him to vengeance; and as the writer of the book of Job expresses it, "They stretch out their hands against God, they strengthen themselves against the Almighty; they run upon him" with insolence, and venture "upon the thick bosses of his buckler," Job xv. 25. There are multitudes in our day that are arrived at such a dreadful height of impiety, as to call upon him for the damnation of themselves, as well as of their friends, in sport and merriment; they will not believe that the blessed God will ever be found so severe and formidable as preachers describe him; and "because judgment is not speedily executed against the workers of iniquity, therefore the sons of men have their hearts set in them to do mischief." "Madness is in their hearts," Eccl. viii. 11, and ix. 3. Because God delays his indignation, they will

not believe he has any belonging to him, notwithstanding all the terrible words by which he is represented by the prophets, the apostles, and the Son of God himself: and while they rush boldly on those crimes which God has severely forbidden, they are ready to think God is just such a one as themselves, regardless of virtue and government, Psal. l. 21. And because they make nothing of sin, they imagine God will make nothing of it.

O that the sons of men would once learn to know God better, for "there are many who have not the true knowledge of God: I speak it to their shame," when they fancy he is all made up of gentleness and forbearance, without holiness and justice! Alas! sirs, these attributes are as necessary in God as grace and compassion; he is and he must be a wise and righteous governor of the world; and his wisdom requires that impenitent sinners should be punished to secure the honour of his law, and to guard his gospel from contempt.* These awful perfections of the blessed God are as necessary to vindicate his authority and his government from insult and rebellion, as his goodness is needful to encourage sinful creatures to repent and return to their duty. The word of God expressly tells us, he is a God of holiness and "a consuming fire," Heb. xii. 29; but there is many a sinner that will never learn this lesson till

* A governor made up of mere goodness and mercy could be no governor at all; for it is absurd to call that a government, where every subject may do what iniquity and mischief he pleases with impunity. The laws of such a government would cease to be laws, and become mere rules and directions for living, which every one might observe or not, just according to his inclination. To say that it became the wisdom of God to threaten offenders, but that his goodness will interpose in the end, and hinder the punishment, is to say, God is not wise; for if he were, he would certainly have taken care not to let those men into the secret. *Bishop Hort's Sermons*, page 315.

the torments of hell teach it him by dismal experience. They have trifled with his majesty, and mocked at his threatenings all their life, till at the moment of death he awakes like a lion, and tears their spirits with everlasting anguish.

I might take notice also in this place, that there is another mistaken notion of God, into which some persons have unhappily fallen, as though God were the cause and author of sin; and have spoken unadvisedly with their lips, in such language as borders too near upon blasphemy. But it is evident, that a God who will punish the sins of men with such intense pain and torment, can never be so inconsistent with himself as to be the author or cause of those sins. It is granted, that his universal providence has a concern in every thing that is transacted among men; but since he has informed us in what a dreadful manner he will execute his vengeance against sinners in the world to come, it is insolence and indignity against the blessed God to represent him as introducing sin into our world. "Let God be true, though every man be a liar;" let God be pure and righteous, and holy, though every man be found guilty and criminal; otherwise, how shall God judge the world? How can he inflict such torments on rebellious creatures, if he constrain or influence them to practise this rebellion? All opinions, therefore, that allow of such an inference, as though God were the author of sin, must be pronounced false and pernicious to men, as well as injurious to the justice of God; for these notions throw a vile imputation on the blessed God, and charge him with heinous insincerity, to forbid the commission of sin, by all these terrors, and yet suppose him to influence men to the practice of them.

Reflection III. How reasonable is it for us to believe, that such a hell as I have described, is prepared for impenitent sinners, since there are so many

appearances of the beginnings of it here on earth, so many indications, and signs and forerunners of such misery and torment inflicted on sinful men: survey the remarkable executions of God's judgments on the world in several ages and nations; look back to our first parents, who were thrust out of paradise the garden of pleasure, and banished from the gates of it for ever, upon the account of the first sin, and the entrance of it was guarded by a flaming sword to forbid their return. Behold the flood of watery vengeance in the days of Noah breaking up from the vast caverns of the earth, and pouring down from the windows of heaven to punish sin: "deep calls unto deep" in the tremendous noise of these water-spouts, which spread death and desolation over the face of the whole earth, because all flesh had sinned against God their Creator. Turn your eyes to Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain, suffering the vengeance of heaven with lightning and devouring fire bursting from the clouds to punish the unnatural crimes of that country. See the fiery flying serpents, as the messengers of divine anger, to punish the rebellion of the Israelites in the wilderness: mark what multitudes in the camp of Israel received their mortal sting, and were given up to destruction and death. Cast your eyes abroad over the nations, and what records have we of all former ages, which do not manifest the vengeance of God pursuing the iniquities of men, by wars and famines, and pestilences, and every thing that is bitter and dreadful to human nature. See Jerusalem, the city of God, all in flames, and the whole land of Judea laid desolate with deepest distress, diffused and reigning among all the inhabitants of it: above a million of them were actually slaughtered and consumed by famine and sword, as a sacrifice to the anger of God, for their long provocations and the cruel barbarous murder of his Son Jesus. And when you have taken

all these surveys, then tell me if such terrors of the Lord do not give us sufficient warning what unknown agonies and destructions may be expected by obstinate and impenitent sinners from the hand of God, when the utmost limits of his patience restrain his wrath no longer, but his wisdom gives a loose to all his fiery indignation.

To enforce this yet upon your hearts, think again of all the pains and torments of flesh and spirit, which arise from the distempers of body, and from the anguish of soul, even in this present state of trial, this land of hope, this season of divine long-suffering. Go to the hospitals, where the gout, and stone, and rheumatism, and a thousand maladies torture the nerves and the joints of men with intolerable smart; and infer thence what God will inflict both on the flesh and spirit, or the soul and body of sinners, in the day of his complete vengeance, when his offers of mercy and the years of his grace are come to their last period. Go and survey the fields of battle and slaughter, where thousands of the dead and the dying are mingled in confused heaps, and groan out their souls in long anguish and extreme torture, with bruises and wounds, and all the smarting effects of the instruments of war. Now if all these things come under the conduct of Divine Providence in a sinful world, which is yet in a way of hope, what may those resolved and obstinate rebels expect, when all the doors of hope are shut up for ever, and providence has nothing to do on earth or in hell, but to execute the vengeance of God.

Shall we take one step yet farther, and think of the inward pangs of conscience, which some awakened criminals have felt in this life on the account of sin, when the arrows of God have been shot into their souls, and the poison thereof lies drinking up their spirits? Think what dreadful ferments of passion,

and rage, and hatred of God have been found in the hearts of some sinful creatures, when they have grown mad with revenge against God, and against themselves, and envy against all their fellow-mortals who are not in the same circumstances; think yet again how terribly their misery must be aggravated, when the torture of everlasting despair attends all the rest of the pains and sorrows they suffer; and then say if the description of a future hell in the word of God may not be true and real. What anguish beyond all the power of present thought and language, may seize all the powers of wilful and impious rebels against the authority and the mercy of God, when all the stores of his vengeance that have been treasuring up for many years, shall be poured out upon them without any mitigation or mixture of mercy.

Reflection IV. It is matter of surprise, and great astonishment, that thousands and ten thousands of the sinful children of men, from day to day, and from year to year, are walking on the borders of all this misery, and yet are so thoughtless and unconcerned about it. They carry peaceful and easy minds in the midst of this dreadful danger, and while they have all the symptoms of the children of wrath upon them, they live without fear, and make no effort toward their escape. Wretched creatures indeed! who have a mortal disease upon them that will breed this gnawing worm of conscience, that will grow up into all this anguish and distress, and yet are senseless of their own peril, unacquainted with their own state of soul, and are daily treading their earthly rounds of business and of pleasure with a merry heart. All the heavy artillery of divine vengeance is ready to be discharged upon them as soon as the door of death opens and lets them into the invisible world; and yet they walk on fearless and joyful, and have no guard or defence from all

this misery, besides their own vain presumption. Stupid creatures, to lie down at night, and awake in the morning within an inch of hell, and yet secure and fearless! They "live without God in the world," and that even in this land of light and hope, where he offers to visit them with all his graces; and yet they are hasting hourly to the eternal world, where they must meet and behold him in all his terrors.

Will nothing awaken you, O ye obstinate transgressors against God, ye obstinate rejecters of his grace and gospel? Will nothing warn you to flee from the wrath to come? But just thus it was in the days of Noah; the sinners of that generation would not hearken to that preacher of righteousness; and even when they saw the clouds of heaven grow big and black over their heads, and the rain began to be poured down from the skies, little did they imagine that it would have drowned the earth, till they were overwhelmed with the rising destruction. And "so shall it be in the days of the Son of man," when all the warnings of the preachers have been despised, and the threatened vengeance of the book of God derided, when they have set up for bold and witty scoffers, and impudently demanded, "Where is the promise of his coming?" Then shall "the great and terrible day of the Lord come," and pour out upon them the full measure of wrath and indignation.

Is it not time, my friends, to bethink yourselves, whether this be your case? Is it not time for every one of us to examine our souls? Am I exposed to this danger? Am I every moment on the brink of this misery, and yet content to continue so one night or one day longer? Can I ever hope to escape the fury of God, while I thus abuse his patience? Or can I have any expectation of living with him as my God hereafter, if I never seek after him here? The face

of God, as a stranger in the world to come, carries infinite terrors in it, and yet we are content to be strangers to him, and to live without his acquaintance. "The wrath of God abides upon" every man who is unregenerate in this life, and who has not trusted in the name of the Son of God, John iii. 36; yet they are thoughtless of it, for they feel it not; but the moment when they shall awake into the world of spirits, that wrath will be felt with sudden and dreadful anguish, as a most insupportable burden, and will crush all the powers of the soul into torment.

Reflection V. It deserves, and it demands our highest gratitude to the great God, our humblest acknowledgments and our most exalted praises to his majesty and his mercy, that we, who have long ago deserved this misery, are not yet plunged into the midst of it; that we have not been entirely cut off from the land of hope, and sent down to this destruction. Blessed be the name and the grace of our God for ever and ever.

While there are thousands who have been sent down to the place of punishment, whence there is no redemption, before they had continued so long in sin as many of us have done, what a peculiar instance is it of divine long-suffering and goodness, that we are not actually put under the sting of this living worm, under this fiery vengeance from the hand of God! What was there in us that should secure us from this destruction, while we continued in our state of guilt, rebellion, and impenitence? Have we not seen many sinners on our right hand, and on our left, cut off in their sins, and to all appearance they seem to be sent down to the place of sorrows? What is it but the special mercy and distinguishing favour of God that has dealt thus kindly with us, and spared and saved us, week after week, and month after month, while we continued in our iniquities, and has given us

space for repentance and hope? What shall we render to the Lord for all his patience and long-suffering, even to this day? How often have we incurred the penalty of the law of God, and the fiery sentence of condemnation by our repeated iniquities, both against the authority and the grace of God? And yet we are alive in his presence, and are hearing the words of hope and salvation. O let us look back and shudder at the thoughts of that dreadful precipice, on the edge of which we have so long wandered. Let us fly for escape to the refuge that is set before us, and give a thousand glories to the divine mercy that we are not plunged into this perdition.

Reflection VI. Let us learn from this description of hell, and our imminent danger of it, the infinite value and worth of the gospel of Christ; this gospel, which calls us aloud to fly from the wrath to come, and points out to us the only effectual way to escape it. What can all the riches of the Indies do to relieve us under the guilt and distress into which sin had brought us? What can the favour of princes, and the flattering honours of the world do to rescue us from this danger? What can the highest gust of sensuality, and the most exquisite delights of flesh and blood do to secure us against this overwhelming misery? It is only the gospel of the blessed Jesus is our refuge, and our safety from the tremendous destruction.

What are the heights, and depths, and lengths, of human science, with all the boasted acquisitions of the brightest genius of mankind? Learning and science can measure the globe, can sound the depths of the sea, can compass the heavens, can mete out the distances of the sun and moon, and mark out the path of every twinkling star for many ages past, or ages to come; but they cannot acquaint us with the way of salvation from this long, this endless distress.

What are all the sublime reasonings of philosophers upon the abstruse and most difficult subjects? What is the whole circle of sciences, which human wit and thought can trace out and comprehend? Can they deliver us from the guilt of one sin? Can they free us from one of the terrors of the Almighty? Can they assuage the torment of a wounded spirit, or guard us from the impressions of divine indignation? Alas! they are all but trifles, in comparison of this blessed gospel, which saves us from eternal anguish and death.

It is the gospel that teaches us the holy skill to prevent this worm of conscience from gnawing the soul, and instructs how to kill it in the seed and first springs of it, to mortify the corruptions of the heart, to resist the temptations of Satan, and where to wash away the guilt of sin. It is this blessed gospel that clearly discovers to us how we may guard against the fire of divine wrath, or rather how to secure our souls from becoming the fuel of it. It is this book that teaches us to sprinkle the blood of Christ on a guilty conscience by faith, that is, by receiving him as sincere penitents, and thereby defends us from the angel of death and destruction. This is that experimental philosophy of the saints in heaven, whereby they have been released from the bonds of their sins, have been rescued from the curse of the law, and been secured from the gnawing worm and the devouring fire.

A serious meditation of hell in its exquisite pain and sorrow, will enhance our value of the salvation of Christ, and will exalt our esteem and honour of the love of God, who has delivered us from eternal death. If we will but appoint our thoughts to dwell a little on the terrors and vengeance from which the blessed Jesus has rescued us by his glorious undertaking, if we will stretch the powers of our souls, and survey the lengths, and the breadths, and

the depths of this distress and misery which we have deserved, this will discover to us the heights, and the depths, and the lengths of his love, who submitted himself to the curses of the law of God, and was made a curse for us, that he might redeem us to the possession of an eternal blessing, Gal. iii. 23. This will show us what exceeding riches of the grace of God have been laid out upon us for our salvation. This will spread before us the unmeasurable love of Jesus, which has brought him down from the bosom of his Father into such agonies as he sustained in the garden, and on the cross, that he might rescue us from the wrath to come. O what immense and endless debts of gratitude and love are due from every ransomed sinner, who has been released from the bonds of his guilt and from all this wretchedness by the love of God the Father, and the grace of his Son Jesus Christ, to whom be glory, and honour, and most exalted praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

DISCOURSE XIII.

THE ETERNAL DURATION OF THE PUNISHMENTS IN HELL.

MARK ix. 46.

Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

SECTION I.

ARGUMENTS TO PROVE THE PERPETUITY OF HELL.

WHEN the great and blessed God had a mind to make known his wisdom, his power, and his goodness amongst creatures, he built this world as a theatre, in which those perfections of his nature might be displayed amidst the various works of his hands: he spread it round with the blessings of life and pleasure, he overhung it with a canopy of skies and stars, and placed the glorious bodies of the sun and moon there to appear in their alternate seasons; and even amidst the ruins which sin has brought into this world, yet still every eye may behold the traces of an almighty, an all-wise, and a bountiful God.

When the same divine and sovereign Being designed to exalt and diffuse the wonders of his grace among the best of his creatures, he built a heaven

for them, and furnished it with unknown varieties of beauty and blessing; and we would hope in our appointed season to be raised to this upper world, and there to behold the riches of divine magnificence and mercy, and to be sharers thereof among the rest of the happy inhabitants.

But since sin and wickedness have entered into his creation of men and angels, he saw it necessary also to display the terrors of his justice, and to make his wrath and indignation known amongst rebellious creatures, that he might maintain a just awe and reverence for his own authority, and a constant hatred of sin through all his dominions. For this purpose he has built a hell, a dreadful building indeed, in some dismal region of his vast empire, where he has amassed together all that is grievous and formidable to sensible beings, and wicked spirits carry their own inward hell thither with them, a hell of sin and misery; and though he has sent his own Son to acquaint us with the distresses and agonies of that doleful world, and to warn us of the danger of falling into it, yet if any of us should be so unhappy as to continue in an obstinate state of impenitence and disobedience to God, we shall be made to confess, by dreadful experience, that not one half hath been told us.

Therefore hath God set before us these terrors in his word, that we might fly from this wrath to come, and avoid these sufferings; and therefore do his ministers, by his commission, proceed to publish this vengeance and indignation of the Lord, that sinners might be awakened to lay hold on the hope that is set before them, and might be affrighted from plunging themselves into this pit of anguish, whence there is no redemption.

We have taken a short survey of these miseries in the kind and nature of them, in some former discourses; and we are now come to the last thing

contained in our Saviour's description of hell, and that is the perpetuity of it; the misery is everlasting in both the parts of it, for "the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." The arguments which shall be employed to prove it are such as these:—

Argument I. The express words of Christ and his apostles pronounce these punishments eternal; and surely these words are given to us to be the foundation of our faith and practice, and the rules of our hope and fear. My text seems to carry plain and unanswerable evidence in it. "The worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." And it is many times repeated in this chapter, and that with a special accent on the eternal duration of it, to make that circumstance of it more observed and to aggravate the terror. Such an awful repetition from the lips of the Son of God should make the sound of the vengeance dwell longer on the ear, and the threatening sink deeper into the soul.

Let us next observe the final sentence which Christ, as Judge, pronounces against impenitent sinners among the sons of men, as well as against fallen spirits, in Mat. xxv. It is this: "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:" and as soon as the sentence is pronounced, it is immediately executed, as our Saviour foretells in the last verse: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." What he pronounces as a judge, he foretells also as a prophet that it shall be put in execution.

The express word of God, in describing the punishment of sinners by the pen of his two apostles Paul and John, declares the same thing, 2 Thess. i. 9: "They shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." And the book of the Revelation gives us assurance, that these

miseries shall have no end. Rev. xiv. 10, 11: the Antichristian idolaters, "who worship the beast, shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out, without mixture, into the cup of his indignation, and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the Lamb, and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever." Jude the apostle bears his testimony in the same manner, ver. 6, the damned spirits, who kept not their first estate, are said to be "cast down into hell, and bound in chains of everlasting darkness." Now suppose a man plunged into a pit of thick darkness, by the command of God, and bound there with everlasting chains; what hope can he ever have of deliverance?

And if Christ and his apostles, who were taught by him and by his blessed Spirit, assert this punishment shall be eternal, who shall dare to contradict them? Who is there so rash and confident as to say, "This torment shall not be everlasting, this worm one day shall die, and this fire shall be quenched?" Does it not approach to the crime of contradicting the Almighty, and the true God?

Argument II. There is a sort of infinite evil in sin, arising from the consideration of the person against whom it is committed, that is, the great and blessed God; for every crime, according to the law of nations, and the common sense of mankind, takes its aggravation from the dignity of the person offended, as well as from the heinousness of the act, so reproaches or assaults against a king, or a father, are much more criminal and heinous than the same assaults or reproaches cast on an equal or an inferior; but all sin being an offence against God, an infinite object, and a violation of his law, is a dishonour of infinite majesty, an affront to the divine authority, and therefore its aggravations arise in that proportion

to a sort of infinity, and require an equal punishment. But because the nature of a creature cannot suffer infinite punishment in the intenseness of the pain, therefore he must bear it to an infinite duration, that is, to all everlasting.

When divine justice pronounces a sentence against the sinner equal to the demerit of sin, it must be infinite, that is, eternal; and the sinner shall never be released from the prison and the punishment till he has paid the utmost farthing, Matt. ix. 25, and till he has made satisfaction to God equal to his demands and the demerit of the offence.

I know this argument is treated with much contempt and derision among those of the moderns, who would diminish the evil of sin, and shorten the punishment of it; but it is much easier to ridicule it than to answer it: a jest is no refutation. And after my best survey of it, I think, without prejudice or partiality, the force of it seems to me unanswerable as to the desert of sin; and I am not ashamed to employ it in the support of this truth.

It is but a very feeble opposition can be made to it by those who say, that if sin be counted an infinite evil, and must have infinite punishment, then all sins are equal, and will require equal punishment, for there are no different degrees in infinity, or in things which are infinite.

But our Saviour has taught us, that there are certainly various degrees of punishment as well as of sin; he assures us, that it shall be more tolerable for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha, in the day of judgment, than it shall be for Capernaum and Bethsaida, where he had preached and wrought his wonders, Luke x. 12, &c.; and the reason is plain, namely, because the sins of Sodom were less than theirs.

And it is very easy to answer this pretence or objection about the equality of all sins, for sins may

have different degrees of guilt and aggravation as to the act, where the object is the same, whether this object be finite or infinite; as the murder of a father or a king is a much greater crime than a reproach or slander cast on the same persons. So the wilful hatred of God and blasphemy against him, with continued malice and public violent opposition to his name, or law, or gospel, are far greater sins than a single neglect of his daily worship for fear of persecution, or a distrusting his providence, though both have the same infinite Being, that is, God, for their object; and in this sense there is a sort of infinity in each of the crimes.

And, accordingly, punishments may be proportioned to every crime; for they may differ greatly in the degree of severity and torture, though they may be all equal or eternal in the duration. Sodom and Gomorrha, Capernaum and Bethsaida, may all suffer infinite or everlasting sorrow, and yet the degrees of their pain may be exceedingly different all the while. They may have the same infinity of duration, though very different as to the intenseness or degree of the pain.

Argument III. If the iniquities committed in this life were not punished with torment which is everlasting, yet the damned in hell are ever sinning against God, and therefore they provoke the vengeance of God to continue his punishing hand upon them for ever. The law of God in all its demands of duty, its prohibitions of sin, as well as in its sanctions of punishment, continues for ever in force in heaven, and earth, and hell, and we see not how it can be abrogated, where it arises from the very nature of God and a creature: and "cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the law," Gal. iii. Every new sin demands a new curse and a new punishment, and there is no reason

which forbids a righteous governor to cease punishing, while the rebellious creature will not cease to offend, and especially while he maintains an everlasting enmity and rebellion against the law of God his creator.

If there were any humble meltings of repentance in the guilty soul, if there were any sincere mournings in the sinful creature for having offended his Maker, if there were any softness of heart relenting under a sense of the evil of sin, and returning to obedience and duty, even this would not oblige a righteous and wise governor to forgive the criminal: repentance is no compensation for a wilful offence; nor is it thought unrighteous or unwise for a prince to punish even a penitent offender with death.

But let us propose the case in utmost favour to a sinner against the blessed God, let us imagine that divine wisdom and divine mercy perhaps might be supposed to contrive and to offer some proposals to justice in a way of compassion, and might inquire whether the sentence of punishment could not be reversed, or the terror of it relieved, or some new state of trial proposed. Let it be added in favour of the criminal, that we do not find through all the book of God the actual practice of true repentance beginning among men, but it has been always followed with proportionable degrees of compassion from God; but, on the other side, when there is nothing found in the heart of a sinner but obstinacy, and malice, and revenge, cursing, and blasphemy against the Almighty without the least moving or melting into a genuine penitence or holy sorrow, without any meek submission to the majesty and justice of God, or humble imploring his mercy, what reasonable hope can such wretches have, that their chains of darkness should be broken, and the prisoners released from the vengeance? When they shall curse his justice, because it punishes their crimes, when they shall

curse his mercy, because it did not save their souls, and curse and blaspheme the blood of the blessed Jesus, because it has not washed away their sins, what possible excuse can be made for such creatures? Or what possible expectation can there be for such criminals, but an everlasting continuance of the fiery indignation?

Here it will be replied, But why should we suppose, and much more, why should we affirm, the damned will never repent? Are they not free in the other world from this flesh and blood, wherein there are so many unruly passions and appetites? Are they not far remote from all the temptations of flesh and sense, of intemperance, ambition, and covetousness? Have they not understanding to see divine truths more clearly, than in this world? Have they not reason to distinguish good and evil, and free will to choose that which is good? Will they not hate all sin, since they have been so long taught the mischief of sin by their sufferings? And is there any thing fitter than their agonies and torture by fire, to make men know and feel the dreadful evil of sinning against God, and awaken them to repentance?

To this I answer, Let us judge a little concerning the sinners in hell, by the practice of sinners on earth. How many wretched creatures are there who have been long imprisoned, and perhaps punished for crimes against the state, and yet persist in their rebellious temper, and are never convinced they were in the wrong, so far as to change their treason into sincere submission, repentance, and obedience? Was not Pharaoh, king of Egypt, an instance of the stubbornness and impenitence of human nature, when, in opposition to ten dreadful plagues, he would still pursue the flying Israelites, and destroy a people beloved of God? Is not hardness and enmity against the governor often increased by the severe punishments that criminals lie under?

Have these punishments any sufficient power to soften their hearts into true repentance?

What though they do not live in the midst of sensual temptations, yet who knows how far their spirits having been immersed in flesh and blood, may carry with them inward raging appetites to those sinful sensualities and defiling pleasures, of which they are for ever deprived?

Let me ask again, Have the devils ever repented in almost six thousand years? Are they not the same enemies to God, and his glory, and his image, through all ages? And though the damned spirits of men are absent from this world and their evil companions on earth, yet are they not in the fittest company to teach them pride, and rage, resentment, and malice, and the most unfit to teach them humility, repentance and obedience to God? And when they have perversely sinned away all the means of grace, in this life, is it reasonable to imagine, that God will powerfully soften their hearts by his sovereign grace, since he has never given the least hint or instance of it in all the discoveries made in the Bible? And has it not been often one way of God's punishing sinners here in this world by letting them go on in their iniquity and madness to the end? And why may not the wisdom and justice of God see it fit to treat sinners who have been incorrigible in this life, by the same method in the world to come?

Argument IV. The natural effects and consequences of sin living in the soul, are misery and torment so long as the soul lives, that is, for ever. Sin, though it be a moral evil, as it is committed against God, yet it is such an enemy to the nature of man, that where it has established its habit and temper in the soul, it naturally prepares constant anguish of conscience and certain misery. A wicked spirit all over averse to God and goodness, gone from this

world, and all the soothing or busy amusements of it, intense in its desires of happiness, and yet a stranger to all that can make it truly happy, and at the same time shut out by God's righteous judgment, from all the means and hopes of grace, must needs be miserable, and has prepared a state of endless misery for itself, because its nature and duration are immortal. An unholy creature who loves not God, and cannot delight in things holy and heavenly, but derives its chief joy from sinful pleasures, can never taste of felicity, can never relish the satisfactions that come from the knowledge, and love, and enjoyment of God; and when it is torn away, and banished from all the sensible amusements of this life, it must and will be a wretched creature in the world of spirits, and that by the very course of nature: and God cannot be obliged to change the established course of nature to relieve this misery which the sinner had wilfully brought on himself; nor can God make him happy without giving him a new temper of holiness, which he is not obliged to do by any perfection of his nature, or any promise of grace.

If the souls of men are immortal, such will their passions be, their desires, their fears, and their sorrows. Now their natural desires of happiness, as I have said, will be intense and strong, when God the spring of all happiness, who hath been renounced and abandoned by them, hath now for ever forsaken them, and separated himself from them. What can there remain for them but everlasting darkness and despair, without a dawn of hope through all the ages of eternity? Their guilty consciences, with the views of God's unchangeable holiness, will for ever fill them with new fears and terrors, what shall be the next punishment they are to suffer. Such is the state of devils at this time, who expect a more dreadful punishment at the great day, as several

places of scripture make evident. Their being immersed in the guilt of sin, and under the constant and tyrannical dominion of it, will overwhelm them with present grief, with cutting sorrows, and horror unspeakable, which will sink into the centre of their souls, and make them an eternal terror and plague to themselves.

Again, let us consider their immortality of soul will be spent in thinking; and what comfortable or hopeful object is there in heaven, earth, or hell, on which they can fix or employ their thoughts for one moment, to give a short release from their extreme misery? So that they are left in endless successions of most painful thoughts and passions from the very nature of things.

Again, suppose this body of mine were by nature immortal, and was designed by my Creator in its constitution to live for ever; and suppose by my own folly and madness, my own wilful indulgence of appetite and passion, I had brought some dreadful distemper into my flesh which was found to be incurable, whether it be the gout or the stone, or some more terrible malady of the nervous kind, must not this gout, by necessity of nature, become an immortal gout? Must not these distempers be immortal distempers, and create eternal pain? And is the God of nature bound to work a miracle to cure and heal these diseases which I have wilfully brought upon myself by my own iniquities, and that after many warnings? Is it unrighteous in God to let me languish on amidst my agonies and groans as long as my nature continues in being, that is, to immortality? And especially when there are valuable ends in divine providence, and God's government of the world to be subserved, by suffering such wilful, rebellious, and impenitent creatures to become sacrifices to their own iniquity and his justice, and perpetual monuments to other worlds of their own madness and his

holiness. Such is the case of a sinful spirit, and therefore a God of justice may pronounce upon it, and execute the eternal misery.

SECTION II.

THE STRONGEST AND MOST PLAUSIBLE OBJECTIONS AGAINST THE PERPETUITY OF HELL ANSWERED.

I think these reasons, which have been given, are sufficient to justify the ministers of the gospel in representing the punishments of hell as everlasting; but man, sinful man, does not love to hear of this dreadful perpetuity of hell; they would fain find some period to these sorrows; they search on every side if there be no way for escape from this prison, no door of mercy, no cranny of hope left among the reasons of things, or among the attributes, or the transactions of the blessed God; and they are ever proposing some methods to cut short this eternity, which scripture ascribes to the punishment of impenitent sinners. I shall endeavour therefore here to give a fair and plain answer to the strongest objections against this doctrine with which I ever yet have met.

The first objection is raised from a criticism on the words of scripture. The Greek and Hebrew words, say they, which we translate eternal and everlasting, where the torments of hell are mentioned, are not always used for proper and complete eternity; they sometimes signify only a long duration: so God gave Abraham and his seed the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, Gen. xvii. 8, but now the Turks possess it. Several of the statutes of the Levitical law were said to be everlasting, Lev. xvi. 34. But they are all abolished in the gospel. The sons of Aaron had an everlasting priesthood conferred upon them, Exod. xl. 15. But this office is

cancelled by the kingdom of the Messiah, and finished for ever.

Besides, let it be remembered, say the objectors, that the Hebrew word *olam*, and the Greek *aion* and *aiones* signify only the various ages or periods of time which belong to the duration of creatures, or to some constitutions of God concerning his creatures: and they should be translated an age, or ages, more properly than any thing else: and the adjective *aionios*, when applied to creatures, can relate only to these ages; but these expressions were never designed to enter into God's own eternity, either before the existence of this world, or after the consummation of it; upon which reason it is highly improper and absurd to assert, that the duration or punishment of creatures in hell shall be properly eternal and equal to the duration of the blessed God himself. Now since every thing in God's transactions towards creatures is sometimes limited by these *aiones* or ages, which are periods of time that shall be finished, why may not the damnation and the sorrows of hell be also finished and cancelled at a certain length of years, though the common words, which we translate eternal and everlasting, be ascribed to them in scripture?

Answer 1. These are the same words both in Greek and Hebrew, by which God expresses his own eternity, which is absolute and complete without end. He is the everlasting God, Gen. xxi. 33. The eternal God, and his everlasting arms, Deut. xxxiii. 27, Rom. i. 20, and xvi. 26, and several other places. These are the words also by which the scripture expresses the duration of the felicities of heaven, and the eternal life and happiness of the saints, Dan. xii. 2, Rom. vi. 23, John iii. 15, &c. Now why should we not suppose the same words to signify the same duration, when the Old or New Testament

speaks of everlasting burnings as the vengeance of God against the wicked, Isa. xxxiii. 14; or "everlasting shame and contempt?" Dan. xii. 2. And especially where the joys of the saints, and the misery of sinners, are set in opposition to one another in the same text, as in Dan. xii. and Matt. xxvi. 45; "The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal." And yet farther, when we find this doctrine sufficiently confirmed by many other places of scripture which set forth the eternity of these torments? I grant, that the eternity of God himself, before this world began or after its consummation, has something in it so immense and so incomprehensible, that in my most mature thoughts I do not choose to enter into those infinite abysses; nor do I think we ought usually, when we speak concerning creatures, to affirm positively, that their existence shall be equal to that of the blessed God, especially with regard to the duration of their punishment. Perhaps this sort of language may carry in it something beyond what we are called to discourse about, at least in this mortal state, and therefore such comparisons are more safely omitted.

But I would remark here still, that these *aiones* or ages both of reward and punishment, which are pronounced concerning saints or sinners, begin in their perfection only at the end of this world: and thence it follows, that they must enter far into the eternity of God's existence yet to come: and the saints will be made happy, and the sinners will be punished for long ages after the end of this world, and all the *aiones* or ages of it.

And though God, by his Spirit, has not been pleased to make this comparison expressly nor assert our duration commensurate with his own, yet he is pleased to express the duration of the punishment of sinners in the same common language and

phrases, by which he expresses his own duration, and the happiness of the saints; and hereby he encourages us to express these punishments by the same common words in our language too, rather than venture to cut them short by a Greek or Hebrew criticism, without any divine warrant or necessity.*

Now are there any sinners so void of understanding, of so daring and desperate a mind, as to venture their eternal all upon such a poor criticism of words? Even upon supposition these terms in the Greek and Hebrew might signify any long duration short of eternity; yet there is a terrible hazard in confining them to this sense, since they do denote a proper eternity, when they describe the duration of the blessed God; and I think we may add also, the duration of the happiness of the saints.

Besides let it be remembered, that the other expressions of scripture, which denote and pronounce the perpetuity or eternity of these punishments, are not liable to the same criticism or ambiguity of a word. Their fire shall be unquenchable, or is not quenched, their worm dieth not. "They have no rest day nor night; they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever," Rev. xiv. 20. These expressions seem to carry with them a more certain signification of the perpetual continuance of the punishment. Now can the tempter and the deceiver of souls have so unhappy an influence over you, as to persuade you to venture onward in the paths of

* The word *aidios*, perpetual, is also applied to the chains of devils, Jude 6, as well as to God, Rom. i., and, however the word *aion* and *aiones* may be used for ages or periods in this world, yet *aiones ton aionon*, or ages of ages, is never applied in all the New Testament to any thing but God or Christ, or the blessedness of saints, or the punishment of sinners; and therefore we may well conclude, that all these four run into an eternity beyond all the supposed periods of this world, and far beyond all our conceptions.

sin, to put off religion and delay your repentance, and neglect the means of salvation, in hopes that hereafter this weak criticism, upon some of the threatenings, may take place before the Judge of the whole earth, and thus excuse or save you? Is not such a sorry refuge and presumption a dangerous and a dismal sign upon impenitent sinners, that sin and Satan have darkened your understanding and confounded your judgment, as well as hardened your hearts, in order to your everlasting destruction?

Answer 2. Suppose the punishments of hell continue only for a long time, and not for an endless immortality, yet this time would certainly be found exceedingly long for sinners to bear the torment, even according to their own criticisms. Let us consider this matter under some particulars. The Jewish dispensation, which is sometimes called everlasting, stood near about fifteen hundred years, from Moses to Christ; and are ye content to languish and groan under torments and miseries, for fifteen hundred years, merely to satisfy your vicious appetite of pleasure for a few days or a few years of this mortal life?

Again, the rebellious sinners, who were destroyed at the flood, and their spirits, which were sent into the prison of Hades, or hell, were certainly confined there four and twenty hundred years; and if they were released then, as some imagine, by the preaching of Christ to them, it is a long and dreadful time to continue under the vengeance of God; and is it worth while for any man to continue in sin on earth, and to venture this length of punishment in hell?

What I build this computation upon, are some expressions of St. Peter, 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20; where Christ is said to "preach unto the spirits in prison, which some time were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah;"

some have supposed, that this text informs us of Christ's descent into hell after his death, and then preaching to those rebels who were drowned in the flood, near two thousand four hundred years before, in order to awaken them to repentance and salvation: whereas others think this text may be better expounded concerning the spirit of Christ given to Noah, which made him a preacher of righteousness, when he foretold and threatened a flood of waters, and called men to repentance.

But if it should be granted, that those rebellious spirits among the dead did all repent, and were delivered by this preaching of Christ, would you choose to indulge the delights of sin for a short season, and venture twenty-four hundred years of torment and anguish for it?

Yet farther, the devils have lain under punishment nearly six thousand years, namely, four thousand before Christ came, and almost two thousand years since, which may be thus computed from what St. Jude says of them. "The angels who kept not their first estate, were cast into chains of darkness," probably before the creation of this our world, for they were fallen, and tempted Adam to sin as soon as this world was made: and they had been confined in these chains from that time about four thousand years before Christ came, and are waiting still for yet sharper punishment at the judgment of the great day; Jude 6; and it is evident that they are conscious of this terror and this future increase of punishment, for they expostulated with our Saviour, Matt. viii. 29: "Art thou come to torment us before the time?" Now it is nearly two thousand years since Christ came, and from the time of their sinning, to this day, it is almost six thousand years: and when the great day of judgment comes, their fiercer punishment is but then to begin: and are not the devil and his angels sentenced and confined to dwell together with the

wicked children of Adam, when they shall be consigned at that dreadful day to the same everlasting fire and torment, which was prepared for those evil spirits? And who knows when their torment will end? Now what folly and hardness of heart, or rather what madness is it for men to continue in their sins, to delay their return to God, and abandon the grace of the gospel under this foolish flattery and wild presumption, that above six thousand years hence, perhaps a certain day may come when the worm of conscience will die, and the fire of hell will be quenched? Such presumption is madness and distraction rather than reasoning.

The second objection is derived from the justice and equity of God. Surely, may some person say, the justice of God will proportion the punishment to the offence; but since our sins are but the actions of mortal and short-lived creatures, and are committed in a few years of time, why should the punishment be immortal, and the anguish be lengthened out to eternity? Can a righteous God pronounce such a severe and unjust sentence, and execute it in its full dimensions?

Answer. It is not the length of time which wicked men spent in committing their sins, nor the nature of the persons who have sinned, that determines the measure of punishment, but the dignity of that infinitely glorious Being, against whom sin is committed, that gives such a high aggravation as to require punishment without end. How many instances are there amongst men, wherein offenders against their neighbours, or against a magistrate, who spent but a few moments in the crime, yet are doomed to imprisonment for months and years? And a lower degree of trespass against a king, which is short of high treason, is sometimes punished with confiscation of goods, and with poverty and close imprisonment for life; and by the same reason, the

sins of men being committed against a God of infinite majesty, require an endless punishment, as I have proved in the second argument; and therefore divine justice pronounces or inflicts no longer penalty than the crimes of men deserve, according to their aggravations. If any sinners tarry then till they have paid the utmost farthing to divine justice, I grant God will release them, but he has given us no hope before.

The third objection is drawn from the sovereignty and goodness of God. It is granted, say they, that the threatenings of eternal death are denounced against sinners in scripture, yet it is not necessary God should execute them to the full. When a law is made, the threatenings of it only declare what punishment the offender shall be exposed to, and shall be obliged to bear when it is inflicted; but these expressions in a law do not oblige the government to inflict that sentence with all its terrors. It is granted, that in the case of promises, truth and veracity oblige the promiser to fulfil them punctually, because the right of the thing promised passes over to that other person to whom the promise was made, and he hath such a right to require it, that it is injustice to withhold it from him; and therefore everlasting felicity must be given to the righteous: but in threatenings the case is otherwise; for though the full punishment is due to sinners, yet they will never require the execution of it; and the goodness of God will incline him to relieve the sufferer, and to release him from the severity of such a punishment, where his veracity or truth does not forbid it.

To this I answer two ways:

1. I will not debate this point of law now, how far a governor of sovereign and absolute authority can dispense with his own threatenings, can omit the execution of them, relax the degree of threatened punishment, or shorten the duration of it: but let it be

considered, that here is not only the threatening of God, the universal Governor, but the prediction of this eternal punishment, by a God who cannot lie. God's own truth and veracity are concerned in this case, since his Son Jesus, who is the greatest of his messengers, together with the prophets and apostles, have in the name of God often foretold, that these punishments shall be eternal; and therefore whatsoever an absolute governor might do, as to shortening the punishment threatened, in a way of mercy and relaxation, yet I cannot see how the truth and veracity of God himself, or the veracity of his Son Jesus Christ, who is the great Prophet, or the truth of the rest of the prophets and messengers can be maintained, if this punishment be not executed according to the many express predictions of it. These all agree to tell us, by inspiration from heaven, in various forms of speech, that the torments of hell shall be everlasting; and, as I hinted before, the man Jesus, who pronounces this eternal sentence as a lord and a judge, foretells it also as a prophet, that the execution of it shall be everlasting.

Answer 2. Obstinate and impenitent sinners have no reason to expect, that the goodness of God should release them from their miseries, since the justice and the holiness, the righteous government and authority of God in his law require and demand their due of honour, as well as his goodness. Do we not see these honours of divine justice, and of God's hatred of sin, have been continually demanded and executed in the infinite and innumerable evils, sorrows, miseries, diseases and deaths, that have been spread over this world almost six thousand years because of sin? Nor does his goodness forbid or hinder it.

And let it be remembered too, that all this immense variety and long succession of plagues and terrors arose originally from the just indignation and resentment of God against one sin, even that of the

first man. Who was it that burnt Sodom and Gomorrha with fire from heaven? Who was it that chained fallen angels in darkness to a more terrible judgment? Was it not a God of supreme goodness? Who sent famines, and pestilences, and slaughters all over the earth in many distinct generations, whereby mankind have been made abundantly wretched and plunged into millions of distresses? And yet the goodness of God abides for ever. And while the great God is acting according to the glories of his nature and government in punishing rebellious creatures, his goodness will feel no soft and sensible impressions from all their groans and outcries; but if I may so express it, will be changed into just indignation without end. And the language of it to those impenitent wretches will be this: "Because I have called and ye refused, ye have set at naught all my counsel and would none of my reproof, I will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall ye call upon me, but I will not answer; ye shall seek me early, but ye shall not find me; for ye hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; ye would none of my counsels, ye despised all my rebukes; therefore shall ye eat of the fruit of your own way, and be filled with your own devices." Take them, angels, "bind them hand and foot, and cast them into everlasting fire and utter darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." Prov. i. Matt. xxii. 13.

Let us cease then to murmur against the threatenings and transactions of the great God, till we are become fitter judges of his perfections and their demands. Let us cavil no more against his conduct and government, till we can teach him how far his punishing justice shall go in the execution of his

threatenings, and till we can assign to him the point and limit where his goodness shall interpose and restrain that justice.

The fourth objection is derived from the rectitude of the nature of God, or his common equity and mercy united, which has been represented in this manner. Suppose one of the damned spirits among mankind should address himself to the great God in such sort of language as this: "Lord, I was created by thy sovereign pleasure without my own will; I did not desire to be made, much less to be born in such a relation to Adam, whereby I brought a sinful nature into the world with me; but I was united by thy power and pleasure to a body which had the seeds of sin and misery in it; there were strong appetites and violent passions mingled with my flesh and blood, which I myself had no hand in procuring; they fermented in me with much vehemence, and I was tempted to many excesses; I made some resistance at first, and many times tried to subdue them, but I was overcome: at last I suffered myself to be carried away by the stream of these sinful affections and appetites, which I could not possibly avoid, nor easily subdue. Is it agreeable to thine equity, O blessed God, to punish such a poor wretch with everlasting torments? And can thy mercy continue to see this my misery for ever and ever, and not help me? I entreat thee, O thou almighty Author of my being, to destroy and annihilate me utterly soul and body; take away this being which I never asked nor desired; nay, which I would not have consented to accept among the sinful race of mankind, because in this track of generation and existence I stood much more likely to be miserable than to be happy."

Answer I. As for the reasonableness and equity of the conveyance and communication of the original effects of the sin of Adam through every generation of man, it is granted there are some difficulties

attending it; but these are generally answered by the writers on that subject; and for me to divert from my present discourse, in order to debate this point here would be too tedious.

The equity of this wise and awful constitution of God has been lately vindicated in a large Treatise on the Ruin and Recovery of Mankind, especially in the second edition of that book. But it is enough for my present argument to say that God himself will make the equity of this constitution to appear with much more evidence and conviction in the last great day, when millions of actual criminals shall stand before the judgment-seat, who owe the first spring of their sin and ruin to our common parent, and yet will fall under the righteous condemnation of the Judge.

Answer 2. When God decreed to give thee a being, O sinner, and designed thee in his eternal ideas to be a man, placed among a thousand blessings of nature and providence, it was then a favour of thy Creator; for thou wert designed also in this original divine idea to have full sufficiency of power to become wise and happy. It was also a favour from thy Creator, that he took all these thy sufficiencies of power, and put them into the hand of one man, even the father of thy race, because he was as wise, and holy, and as well able as any man of his posterity could be to preserve his station in the favour of God, and to secure thy happiness together with his own; and he had much stronger obligations to obey his Maker, and more powerful motives to secure thy happiness than thou thyself, or any single man could possibly have, because he was intrusted with the felicity of so many millions of his own dear offspring as well as his own. Now though Adam, thy first father, being thus furnished with sufficiencies of power, and with the strongest obligations to preserve himself and thee, has actually sinned and ruined

himself and his offspring; this is indeed an unhappy truth, but the great God is not to blame, who has not only acted wisely but kindly towards his creatures in this constitution, because, so far as we can judge, it was much more probable that Adam would have maintained his innocence and his happiness, together with that of his offspring.

Again, when the race of man was ruined, and God saw that every man would come into the world under unhappy circumstances of guilt and corruption of nature, he provided a covenant of grace, and brought thee into some knowledge of it; and this had been effectual to have recovered and saved thee from the ruins of the fall if thou hadst exerted all thy force, employed all thy natural powers of understanding and will for this purpose, and used all thy diligence to follow the methods of his grace, and hadst sought earnestly for divine aids; for there is no man among the damned is able to say, I have done every thing that was in my power to do; no man shall be condemned for what was utterly impossible for him to avoid: it is confessed indeed that thou art laid under some hardships and difficulties by the sin of thy first father; yet it is thine own actual and personal crimes for which thou art here condemned at this judgment, wherein every one shall be judged and rewarded "according to his works;" it is for many wilful offences against the law of God, and for sinning against the offers of divine grace; it is for obstinacy against thy own conscience, and all the outward and inward monitions of thy duty, that thou art fallen under this sentence, and because thou didst not labour and strive against sin, and resist it even to the end of thy state of life and trial. Thou hast had many an inward reproof for sin, many a secret or public call to virtue, and perhaps loud and fair warnings of thy danger: but thou hast turned a deaf ear to them all, and it is

thy own folly, obstinacy, and iniquity, that have brought thee into this misery, and thou must eat the fruit of thy own works.

If there should be any person found indeed among Jews, Gentiles or Christians, who can justly complain, I have not had a fair and full state of trial, and yet I am condemned, I think we may grant that the righteous God will release such from their misery after they have worn out a proper number of years in punishment proportionable to their past crimes; and that there shall be a fair, and full, and proper state of trial appointed to them before they shall be utterly and irretrievably miserable; but if no such person be found there, if there be no such just complaint to be made among millions of the damned, then they may be still continued in their prison and punishment without any imputation upon divine justice and equity.

Answer 3. Whensoever any such criminal in hell shall be found making such a sincere and mournful address to the righteous and merciful Judge of all, if at the same time he is truly humble and penitent for his past sins, and is grieved at his heart for having offended his Maker, and melts into sincere repentance, I cannot think that a God of perfect equity and rich mercy will continue such a creature under his vengeance; but rather, that the perfections of God will contrive a way for escape, though God has not given us here any revelation or discovery of such special grace as this.

But, on the other hand, whatever melting and moving speeches may be made by sinners here on earth, in compassion to the sinners who are gone before them to hell; yet if no such person be ever found in hell, truly and humbly repenting of his sins, (nor have we any reason to think there ever will,) why should a righteous God be obliged to cease punishing

a rebel who only is vexed and raging under his own chains, and who continues in the spirit of obstinacy and rebellion against God, and will not repent of it?

Objection the fifth is derived from the mercy and compassion of God, compared with the mercy and compassion of man. Surely the compassion of the ever blessed God, who has described himself rich in mercy, abundant in goodness, and whose very name is love, 1 John iv. 8, must have transcendent tenderness and pity towards his creatures, the work of his hands, above all the compassions that any one fellow creature can express towards another. Now the very thought and name of eternal punishments, or endless torment, is such as seems to shock the nature of a good-natured man; and though he was never so much injured, yet he would never have a thought of wishing his enemy any kind of eternal punishment for it, much less of condemning him to everlasting misery, and supporting him in being on purpose to suffer it; and therefore we cannot suppose that God will do it.

This objection is farther strengthened by an expression of our Saviour himself, who says, Mark xviii. 19: "There is none good, save one, that is God;" as much as to say, there is none equal or comparable in goodness to God himself; and it is farther supported still by the common notions which good men have of God; those expressions in the apocryphal writings confirm it, 2 Esd. v. 33: "Then said the Lord unto me, Thou art sore troubled in mind for Israel: lovest thou that people more than he that made them?" And in the same book, chap. viii. 47: "Thou comest far short, that thou shouldest be able to love my creature more than I." Now since no good man could wish such a curse or mischief to his worst and most wicked enemy, as torment without end,

surely we cannot conceive the great God will ever be so severe as to inflict it.

Answer 1. It is readily allowed, that God has more goodness than any creature, but God has also more wisdom and knowledge, which concur with his goodness in all his actions, and he forms a much juster judgment concerning the evil and demerits of sin and rebellion against himself, than it is possible for any creature to form; and I think I may boldly assert, none can know the complete evil of sin, or its full desert, but that same glorious Being against whom sin is committed, who knows well the dignity of his own nature and his own law, and what unspeakable injury is done thereto by the sins of men. Now his goodness in all his transactions must be regulated and limited by this infinite wisdom; and if a man does not see and consent to the just demerits of sin against his Maker, it is because he has less wisdom and knowledge than the great God has, and his tenderness and compassion may run into very great excesses, and may be in some instances a sign of his weakness and folly as well as of his goodness and pity, as I shall show under the next answer.

At present let us represent the case in a common instance. When criminals go to execution from month to month, or from year to year, in this great city; and especially if some of them have a handsome and agreeable appearance, and if they are wringing their hands with outcries, and vexing their own hearts, and are stung by their own consciences for their having brought this misery upon themselves, you will find several of the spectators of so tender a make as to grieve for the execution of such criminals, and to wish in their hearts it was in their power to save them. And yet farther, if there are numbers of these wicked creatures that are sent at once to the punishment of the sword or the gallows, there

may be many of these spectators grieving for them, and pitying them, and perhaps exclaiming against the severity of the law, and the cruelty of the judge, for condemning such malefactors to death.

But do all these weepers and complainants judge justly of the case? Do they consider how pernicious and ruinous a thing it would be to a government to let such traitors go unpunished? Do they know, that it is a piece of clemency and goodness to the innocent to punish the wicked? Or that it is a piece of necessary honour due to the laws, to make those who insolently break them sustain the penalty that the law has appointed? Do they remember that the few good qualities, or supposed talents, or fine appearances which these offenders are possessed of, should outweigh the demands of the law and justice, the peace of the nation or kingdom, and the restraint of others from the same crimes?

Answer 2. The goodness of God, the eternal Spirit, is a much superior thing to the tenderness and compassion of man dwelling in flesh and blood. Man grows compassionate by a sort of sympathy, or sensation of the miseries which his fellow-creatures endure; and though this is exceeding useful for many purposes of human life, and therefore God planted it in our natures; yet it has so much mixture of animal nature with it, that it frequently degenerates into weakness, fondness, and folly. And, indeed, if every tender creature must be gratified in this weakness, and form the rules of government, there would never a malefactor fall under execution, but the vilest criminals would be spared, though the government were ruined.

On the other hand, the goodness or mercy of God is a sedate willingness or design to do good to creatures, and particularly to the miserable, but always according to the directions of wisdom and holiness. As God cannot have such anger, resentment, or cru-

elty in his nature, as mankind may fall into when they are punishing offenders, so, properly speaking, he has no such sort of passionate tenderness and sympathy in sparing them; though words of the greatest affection are sometimes used by the sacred writers to figure out the mercies of God to man; yet God both punishes and spares according to the calm and righteous exercises of his wisdom, and not under the influence of such passions as we feel.

Since therefore the exercise of such sort of passions amongst men oftentimes appears to be the weakness of nature joined with their ignorance of the rules of equity, is it reasonable that the great and all-wise God should make such creatures his patterns in the limitation of the exercises of his justice? Or that he should be as weak as they are, and as much moved to swerve from the rules of his own righteous government by such a sort of tenderness as ignorant, weak, and foolish man may sometimes express towards criminals in their deserved misery?

It is readily granted, that a wise and a good man may and ought to be sorry and grieved, that any of his fellow-creatures should be so vicious as to bring themselves under so severe a penalty by their own wilful crimes; but still in their calmest and wisest thoughts they acknowledge the wisdom and equity of the government in inflicting such penalties upon those who heinously offend, and they acquiesce in the sentence and the execution.

Our blessed Lord Jesus himself, who was the wisest and the best of creatures, looked upon the city of Jerusalem with an eye of compassion, and wept over it, Luke xiii. 34: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not? therefore, behold your house is left unto you desolate." Let it be observed

here, that our Saviour had the bowels, and the compassions, and tenderness of the best of men; but he still maintains the vindictive exercise of the government of God. 'Your desolation must and shall come upon you, nor will I forbid or withhold it.' And I am sure the human nature of our blessed Saviour was formed nearest to the image of God beyond any creature besides; and as I have hinted before it is he who is the supreme messenger of his Father's love that has pronounced these eternal punishments upon impenitent sinners in many parts of his ministry.

Answer 3. How far will these objectors permit the justice of God to go in the punishment of impenitent sinners? If eternal punishment must neither be threatened nor inflicted, lest divine goodness be injured, then all mankind, even the worst and vilest of criminals, must certainly be one day delivered from their miseries; and thus the great God who is infinitely offended, is bound to finish his wrath one day and return in mercy to the offenders, whether they return to him by repentance or not. What! may the criminal rebel creature with impudence and spite affront the Creator infinitely, and must not the Creator have a right to demand equal vengeance? No, he must not, according to these writers; for if the essential goodness of God do certainly forbid eternal punishments, these absurdities, as gross as they appear, will be the necessary consequents of it: and though the creature be not restrained from sinning, yet the blessed God will be utterly restrained from punishing: and is this a doctrine fit to be believed by Christians or to be taught by those who have no commission for it from their Bible? Or, indeed, will the light of nature and reason ever justify and support this sort of pleading?

Objection the sixth is drawn from the wisdom of God in his government of the world. Surely, will the sinner say, it was for some valuable end that

God at first pronounced punishment to attend the sins of his creatures, for "he does not afflict willingly, nor delight to grieve the children of men!" his design must be therefore one of these two things: either to correct and reform the sinners whom he punishes, and reduce them to their duty, in order to partake of his mercy, or else it must be to maintain a public monument and demonstration of his justice, and to support the authority of his law, and honour of his government, that he might deter other creatures from sinning against him; but when this world is come to its period, and his governing providence over it is finished, and all the means of grace are ended, the first end, namely, correction and reformation, ceases; there is no more hope of reforming such sinners as these. And what farther need can there be of the secondary design of punishment, namely, the demonstration of his justice in so terrible a manner to restrain others from sinning, when the state of our trial is ended, and all mankind are sent either to heaven or hell?

Answer 1. I might here reply, by way of concession, that if there were no other intelligent creatures to be witnesses of these eternal demonstrations of God's holiness, his justice, and his hatred of sin; and if God himself was the only being who knew of these eternal punishments, I acknowledge I cannot see sufficient reason for this endless duration of them; I cannot give any probable account why creatures, who are never to be corrected and reformed, should be tormented for ever in secret; God perfectly knows his own holiness and justice, without such monuments of it; and since he has asserted this punishment, I think there must be some creatures to receive a moral influence from the knowledge of it.

I answer secondly, When there is a representation made of the punishment of the worshippers of the

beast, in Rev. xiv. 10, 11, that "they shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture, and they shall be tormented with fire and brimstone, and the smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever," it is in the presence of the holy angels as well as in the presence of the Lamb. Angels and other innocent beings may improve such a sight to valuable purposes.

Objection the seventh, When we remember that Jesus Christ himself hath assured us, that but few shall be saved, and that the broad way is full of sinners running down to destruction and death; if we suppose these punishments to be endless, some will be ready to say, What! shall the greatest part of God's creatures be made miserable for ever and ever? Is this consistent with the wisdom and goodness of the blessed God, to form such an immense multitude of souls dwelling in bodies, to make them for ever miserable? What will a God of goodness have to prove his goodness to his creatures, if far the greatest part of them are left in everlasting sorrows?

Answer. The far greatest part of the creation of God may be holy and happy still; for this world of ours, even all mankind, is a very small portion of God's immense dominions; and when the transactions of our earth, and God's present government of it shall be finished, he has a thousand other dominions among the planets and stars, which has been proved by the reason of men to a great degree of probability; and these he governs by righteous laws; and though he has not revealed much of them to us in this life, yet he has discovered something of this kind in his own word; he has acquainted us with his wise and righteous government over fallen angels, and what was their sin, namely, their pride and ambition, and what was their punishment for their first rebellion, Jude 6, and this is done by the wisdom

and mercy of God to affright men from sinning, while we behold how those fallen spirits are exposed and set forth as terrible examples for our warning. And why may not the everlasting punishment of sinners among the children of men be made a standing monument of God's justice, to deter many other worlds from offending him? Other worlds, I say, of unknown creatures, which perhaps may inhabit the planetary globes rolling round the same sun as our earth does; and their state of trial perhaps is not yet begun, or it may be half run out, and yet shall not be finished for some thousands of years?

Or perhaps there are other worlds of spirits, and invisible, incorporeal, intelligent creatures in a state of trial, may persevere in glorious innocence and complete happiness, to the eternal praise of their Maker's goodness, and may yet be kept in their constant duty and obedience, by having always in their view the eternal punishments of wicked men. See this subject treated of more at large in a book called, The Strength and Weakness of Human Reason, second edition, page 288.

The counsels of God are far above our reach, and his dominions and governments are unknown to us. What if the great God will have creatures in some of his territories, who in themselves are weak and ready to fall, and may be deterred from sin and apostacy by such standing manifestations of his hatred of it, and his righteous vengeance against it? And since others have been monuments of warning to us, what if he please to make this wicked world of ours, when he has taken the few righteous out of it to heaven, I say, what if he please to make the rest an everlasting spectacle of his justice and holiness to a hundred or a thousand other worlds, which may be utterly unknown to us? And he may, for this end, reveal his transactions with mankind to those worlds,

though he has not revealed much of their affairs to us.

If I were to mention any other objection worthy of notice, I know of none but this, namely, Some learned men suppose it to have been the opinion of the primitive fathers, that souls departing from this world were sent into Hades, or the state of the dead, where the righteous rested in a state of peace and hope till the resurrection should bring them to heaven; and the most wicked amongst mankind went also to Hades, or this state of the dead, under a long and fearful expectation of the final punishments of hell; but that great multitudes who were of an indifferent character, and who were not so bad but they might be reclaimed, had another state of trial in Hades, whither they say, our Lord Jesus Christ at his death descended and preached the gospel to them, and many of them were recovered, and shall be hereafter raised to eternal life. The chief scripture whence they borrow this, is 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20, of which we have spoken before; and that at the great day of judgment the incorrigible sinners should be sent with the devils into punishment of fire, which, though it may last for a shorter or a longer time, yet should destroy both their bodies and their souls for ever.

To this I answer first, If this had been the doctrine of many ancient Christians, yet unless they could bring plainer proofs of it from the word of God than one difficult and obscure text of St. Peter, there is no great reason for us to receive from them such traditions. The word of God is our only test of truth, and our instructor in matters of the invisible world.

Answer 2. Though there might be a few of the early writers who seemed to incline to some of these opinions; yet this sense is drawn out from most of them by learned men with much difficulty, uncertainty

and conjecture: and there are many others of them who make the punishments of hell as durable as the writers of later ages: nor do they mention or allow of any such sort of purgatory for souls of an indifferent character as this objection pretends. Those who will look into their writings will find abundant evidence, that most of them talk of eternal punishment by fire in the very words and language of the New Testament, and in direct opposition to this doctrine of temporal punishments in hell. I shall cite but two writers, one of which is the very earliest of the Fathers, an acquaintance of St. Paul, and that is Clemens the Roman, who in the eighth section of his second epistle says thus:

"Let us therefore repent whilst we are yet upon the earth: for we are as clay in the hand of the artificer. For as the potter, if he make a vessel, and it be distorted in his hands, or broken, again forms it anew; but if he hath gone so far as to throw it into the furnace of fire, he can no more bring any remedy to it: so we, whilst we are in this world, should repent with our whole heart for whatsoever evil we have done in the flesh, while we have yet the time of repentance, that we may be saved by the Lord. For after we shall have departed out of this world, we shall no longer be able either to confess our sins, or repent in the other." The English reader may find this in Archbishop Wakes's Translation of the most primitive Fathers.

Justin Martyr, who is also one of the most early writers, in the eighth section of his first apology, tells us, that Plato teaches that Rhadamanthus and Minos punished the unrighteous who came before them; and that we Christians say the same thing will be done, but it is by Christ; when their bodies are joined with their souls, and they shall be punished with eternal punishment, and not for the period of a thousand years only, as Plato said. This same writer also,

in very many places of his works, talks of eternal punishment, and of punishment for an endless age, and eternal fire, with eternal sensation or pain.

Irenæus also after him, as well as Ignatius and Polycarp before him, speak of this fire which is not to be quenched, and of death and punishment, not temporal, but eternal. So that it is really an imposition upon unlearned readers to pretend, that the doctrine which denies the eternity of the punishments of hell, was the common sense of the primitive fathers, though it is granted that Origen and some others might be of this opinion.

To conclude; since the word of God has expressly assured us, that these punishments of sinful men shall be eternal, it is not for us to hearken to any other doctrines, and neglect what God has said, nor is it fit for us to dispute the wisdom and justice of the Divine conduct, nor to impeach his goodness. "Let God be true, though every man be a liar;" let God be wise though every man be a fool; let God be just and righteous in all his ways, though man vainly murmur against him, and raise these noisy and feeble remonstrances against his judgments. "The counsel of the Lord shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure" in the eternal manifestations of his justice as well as his grace. If there be any supposed inconsistency or cloud of difficulty remaining on his conduct, he will clear it up to the satisfaction of every rational mind one day, and will bring the conscience of every condemned sinner to acknowledge the equity of his proceedings; the whole creation shall then justify the final sentence of judgment on all the sons of men.

I cannot finish this awful argument better than the apostle finishes the same sort of subject in the ninth and eleventh chapters to the Romans. "O man, who art thou that repliest against God? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, hath endured with much long-suffering the

vessels of wrath who have fitted themselves for destruction? And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he hath afore prepared unto glory? O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge," the justice and the goodness of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

SECTION III.

REFLECTIONS ON THE ETERNITY OF PUNISHMENT IN HELL.

As we have before drawn various inferences from the nature of those punishments that are prepared for sinners in the world to come, so there are other inferences and terrible reflections which may be derived from the duration or perpetuity of the torments of hell.

REFLECTION I. What unspeakable anguish and torture does this one circumstance add to every pain and sorrow of damned creatures, that it is everlasting and has no end! What unknown twinges in the conscience does this thought give to the gnawing of the cruel worm, namely, that it is a worm that never dies! What inconceivable force and sting of torment does this add to the fire of God's indignation in hell, that it is a fire which shall never be quenched. When one year of torment and sorrow is ended, or one thousand years are come to their period, the case of sinners is still much the same, the vengeance remains still as heavy as ever, and seems as far off from its end. This dreadful price, which the justice of God demands for the reparation of our offences against his law and his authority, is a price which creatures can never pay, for it is infinite; and there-

fore when a finite creature begins to make payment thereof with his own sufferings, these sufferings must be everlasting.

It is evident, that one wilful sin is sufficient to sink creatures under the indignation of God for six thousand years; I call the angels who sinned for witnesses to this truth; they were formed in holiness and in glory before the creation of this lower world, and probably they sinned and fell before this creation too; and they are yet imprisoned and confined under perpetual chains of darkness, as the word of God tells us, and reserved to everlasting punishment at the judgment of the great day. And if thou, O sinner, among the sons of men, if thou diest in an unregenerate, unholy, and unpardoned state, the sins of thy whole life are charged upon thee, and thou art daily treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and thou shalt not escape from this prison till thou hast paid the utmost farthing. Rom. ii. 5, Matt. v. 26.

If one sin deserves all this misery which has been described, what a dreadful reckoning will the sins of thy whole life come to, when every command of God which thou hast broken shall appear and demand reparation for its injured honour! Remember, O sinner, obstinate and rebellious, remember thou hast to do with a great and dreadful God, who has all thine iniquities ever before his eyes. Isa. lvi. 5: "Behold they are written before me, and I will recompense, saith the Lord, their iniquity into their bosom." He is a God that will never forget any one of thy crimes. Amos viii. 7: "The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works." Though thou hast lost and forgotten them, he will bring them again into thy conscience with a terrible remembrance; and when this God comes forth in a way of vengeance, "every transgression and disobedience shall

receive a just recompense of reward." "Vengeance belongeth unto me, saith the Lord," Heb. ii. 2, and x. 30. "He that spared not his own Son," when he "laid on him the iniquity of us all," will never spare thee who art the personal and criminal transgressor. Eternal recompenses are due to the demands of justice, and he will punish till full payment is made, equal to the evil of sin, that is, to all everlasting.

Reflection II. What infinite and eternal concerns of men hang upon the short and slender thread of human life! An eternal heaven or an eternal hell depend on our good or ill behaviour in this short and mortal state. While life remains the sinner's hope remains; he abides on the stage of action, and this is the state of trial for eternity: but as soon as the thread of life is broken, immediately ensues endless joy or endless sorrow.

What a poor fleeting vapour, what a thin and frail bubble is this feeble and uncertain thing which we call life! And yet what matters of immense importance depend upon it! This present life is a prize put into our hands, for it is the only time given us to obtain deliverance and escape from eternal death. Life in this view, as mere a bubble and vapour as it is, carries in it something of infinite and everlasting moment: but alas, how wretchedly does foolish and sinful mankind trifle and squander it away amidst a thousand vanities and impertinences, or saunter it out in sloth and laziness, with an utter disregard of the important eternity that depends upon it! What multitudes are there that waste the golden hours of grace, and the seasons of hope, in procuring to themselves, by their own wilful iniquities, a length of damnation and everlasting despair!

While we dwell here in the midst of the means of mercy and salvation, there is hope that our sinful souls may be healed of that disease which is breeding the ever-gnawing worm within us. We may prevent

the fuel of divine wrath from kindling into a flame which cannot be quenched: but when once the clock of life has gone through its appointed spaces, and the last hour strikes, whether it be three or five, whether at twelve at noon or at midnight, all hope is for ever gone; we are plunged into the regions of death, despondency and darkness, and nothing remains but the actual torture of the worm of conscience to seize on us, and the fire of divine anger actually breaks out, which shall burn to the lowest hell.

O could we but behold ourselves in the glass of wisdom while we are yet standing upon the slippery edge of this burning precipice, and playing with painted bubbles there, or in warm pursuit of a flying shining feather along the brink of this burning torrent, what fools and madmen should we appear to be even in our own eyes! And yet we go on to practise this folly, this madness, day after day, in spite of all the warnings of God and man, till at last our foot slips in some dreadful moment, and we vanish out of the sight of our companions, and are lost for ever.

Reflection III. If the miseries of hell are eternal, how unreasonable a thing is it ever to suffer the loss of any possessions or joys which are temporal and perishing to come into competition with them! Surely there is nothing that belongs to time that should tempt us to run the risk of the sorrows of eternity, nor allure us to commit one sin against God, which is the fatal spring of such sorrows! Stand still, O sinner, and hearken to the voice of wisdom. Do the pleasures of sense, or the gaieties of the sight, or the wealth or grandeurs of this life allure thee to make thy way boldly through any means toward the possession of them, think with thyself, is it by offending this great and dreadful God? And wilt thou dare to take one step towards these dangerous and deceitful vanities, and risk thine immortal welfare in

the pursuit? What a foolish bargain wilt thou make to gain the whole world of short-lived perishing trifles, and to lose thy soul in endless perdition! Mark viii. 36. Dare any of us venture an eternal state of torment to gain the flattering and delusive joy of a short hour, or a winter's day?

What are all the gratifications of flesh and sense? What are all the swelling titles of honour amongst men? What are all the treasures of this perishing world? How short is their duration, and how short is thy possession of them! All earthly felicities perish in the using, and are no sooner enjoyed but are quickly lost again, or expire in the enjoyment; but if the ruin of a soul, and a lost heaven, be the price of them, how mad is the purchase, and how wretched is the purchaser!

Reflection IV. How patiently should we bear all the labours and fatigues, the pains and miseries of this mortal life, when we have any hope of our deliverance from the pains and sorrows of immortality? As for our maladies and sorrows here on earth, blessed be God they are not eternal: there are some intervals to relieve, and there is some period to finish them. When we ask a friend, who is sick and in pain, "How fare you?" "I am in pain now," says he, "but I hope I shall be easy anon; I am sick to-day, but I trust I shall be in health to-morrow." This is a sweet mitigation of the present uneasiness, and gives relief to the patient. But how dreadful and piercing would these accents be, if we should hear our friend make this answer to us: "I am all over in extreme pain and anguish, and I shall never, never be eased of it; I lie under exquisite torment of the flesh, and horror in my soul, and I shall for ever feel this horror and this torment." Such is the case of the damned sinners in hell, and therefore their agonies are intolerable.

But if you have any comfortable prospect of the pardon of sin, and a well-grounded hope of eternal salvation through the blood of Christ, and by the rules and promises of the gospel, all the temporal toils and plagues that can possibly stand between us and heaven should be despised and disregarded by us, and we should learn to triumph over them with the victorious songs of thankfulness and praise. Blessed be the name of our God, though he has smitten us sorely, yet he has not given us over to everlasting death.

Let our thoughts ascend to the heavenly regions, and let us ask those who are arrived thither, out of the land of temptation and conflict, out of these tabernacles of sin and sorrow; let us ask them, what gave them so divine a courage and so firm a patience in the midst of all their trials. With one voice they will all make answer, It was the view of our deliverance from an eternal hell, and the hopes of obtaining salvation by Christ Jesus with eternal glory; it is this that supported us under every burden, and bore us on with a spirit of faith and victory through every hardship on earth. It was for this we laboured, and suffered, and counted not life, nor any of the blessings of it dear to us, nor any of the sorrows of it intolerable, that we might escape the everlasting sorrows of a future state, and enjoy the blessings of life eternal. And O may every one of us be the followers of them who through this faith and patience have obtained the promised felicity! May we also make our way by the same motives, through the floods and the fires of affliction and distress, to reach this everlasting heaven, and to escape everlasting burnings!

In order to confirm our patience, and to animate our zeal, let us survey the blessed example of St. Paul, who was reproached, who was buffeted, who was persecuted with stones, and whips, and scourges,

and bore a thousand indignities, who was assaulted with endless strokes of injury and violence, and yet rejoiced in the midst of all his sufferings in the view of his eternal hope. The spirit of faith in the midst of all his sufferings taught him to sing this divine song: "Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed," 2 Cor. iv. 17; Rom. viii. 18. Nor are they worthy to be compared with that exceeding and eternal weight of vengeance, from which we are delivered by faith and patient obedience to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection V. If the miseries of hell are eternal, we can never have our deliverance from them made too secure. If the danger of any mischief to which we might be exposed, were but slight, and the duration of it short, there might be possibly some excuse for our delay to escape it; but when it is total and irrevocable ruin, to which we are liable every moment while we continue in a state of sin, we should fly with all the wings of our souls, and never be at ease or quiet, till we are got without the reach of danger, and settled in a place of safety, or on the Rock of our salvation.

O could we but perceive a thousandth part of the horror that is contained in an eternal hell, an eternal banishment from the face and favour of God, and the eternal impressions of his anger, we should never give ourselves rest one moment, till we had returned to God by a sincere repentance, and were reconciled to him that made us; till we fled for refuge to the blood of Jesus, and to his sanctifying grace, which is the only hope that is set before us. We should never give ourselves leave to lie down, or awake in

quiet, while we were destitute of a saving interest in the salvation of Christ, and had attained to some clear evidence of it, and a well-grounded hope.

Have we not sometimes felt the worm of conscience begin to gnaw within us, and to prey upon our spirits after the commission of some sin? And shall we not apply ourselves with all holy speed to the divine Physician who can kill this gnawing worm within us, and can heal those sinful maladies that are breeding it? Have we not sometimes felt the threatenings of the wrath of God in his law, like a fire in our bones? With what infinite desire then, and what restless vehemence should we fly to the blood of Jesus our great sacrifice, which alone can quench the fiery indignation of God, and prevent it from growing up to an everlasting flame.

Had we upon our spirits such a sense of the terrors of the Lord in hell, as his threatenings represent, we should never be satisfied with such cold doubtful hopes of our deliverance from them, as thousands of nominal Christians are contented with; but we should make every needful and critical inquiry, whether our repentance were sincere, whether our faith in Christ were unfeigned, whether our hopes had a solid foundation in the divine promise; we should search every power of our souls, and examine our hearts through every corner, whether sin be mortified there, whether the Christian virtues are formed within us, and the divine image is begun to be stamped upon our minds; we should be restless and impatient in our inward searches whether we are made new creatures, whether we are born of God and become his children, and are secured by his gospel from this everlasting vengeance. The degree and the infinite duration of this misery should appoint the proportion of our zeal and solicitude to escape it.

A man who sees or feels his own house on fire under him, does not continue upon his bed of sloth,

or sit amusing himself among the ornaments of his chamber, till the flames have broken through and seized him; but with huge outcries he seeks for help, and flies in haste for his life wheresoever he finds a way. Such should be the language, and such the activity of sinful creatures to escape the wrath to come; and such will be the outcries of sinners when they are thoroughly awakened; this language of every place, and of every hour will then be awakened, "What shall I do to be saved? Whither shall I fly for refuge? O blessed Jesus, receive me into thy protection, and be thou my deliverer."

Give me leave to repeat this sort of expostulation with lingering and delaying sinners, or with drowsy and formal Christians. If you would set yourselves often in the blaze of these everlasting burnings, you would never satisfy yourselves with such cold faint wishes, such lazy endeavours, such languid efforts of faith and repentance to escape this fiery indignation that shall never be quenched; nor would you content yourselves with dark and doubtful evidences of your interest in the love of God, and the grace of our Lord Jesus; but you would be day and night busy with your own hearts in the most intimate and careful search after converting grace and living Christianity; you would never be at rest till you felt the new nature working with power and bright evidence within you, that you might be able to say, "We know there is no condemnation belongs to us, but that we are passed from death unto life."

Let us proceed upon this subject, turning the discourse from ourselves to our friends, and say, With what fervour of love, with what holy zeal and compassion should we labour to save our friends and all that are dear to us from this eternal destruction? What words of fiery terror shall we choose to awaken those who slumber on the edge of endless burnings? What language of kind and tender passion shall we

choose to reach their hearts? What phrases of melting pity to hasten their escape from this precipice of burning ruin, or to pluck them as brands out of the fire before it becomes unquenchable? Knowing these terrors of the Lord, with what vehemence of zeal should we try to persuade men, our fellow-mortals, that they would not venture into the midst of these miseries, and beseech them in the name of Christ to be reconciled to God? This was the practice, and these the motives of the great apostle, as he describes them at the latter end of the fifth chapter in his second epistle to the Corinthians.

O with what force of ardent and active compassion should ministers preach both the curses of the law and the grace of the blessed gospel, to perishing sinners, and make haste to rescue their souls from this everlasting vengeance? With what warm and solicitous zeal should they lay hold of those poor thoughtless wretches who are madly indulging their lusts and follies, and thereby preparing themselves to become fit fuel for this eternal fire? They are forming themselves by their iniquities to become vessels of this everlasting indignation; let us seize them by some kind and constraining words of love, some outcries of compassion and fear, lest they rush into those flames which will never be quenched: perhaps when they are summoned away from us by the stroke of death, they may leave us in most uncomfortable sorrows for our neglect, while they are suffering the long endless punishment due to their own iniquities.

Reflection VI. How unreasonable a thing is it for us ministers, who are charged and intrusted with the whole counsel of God for the salvation of men, to avoid the mention of these his eternal terrors in our sermons, and in our addresses to mortal creatures, creatures who are daily preparing themselves for them by their sins, and are ready to plunge into the

midst of them! Has not our blessed Saviour made frequent mention of them in his gospel, and set them in their dreadful array before his hearers? Has he not expressed them in their strongest terms, and spread them in their most frightful colours, and set them in their full and everlasting extent, before the sinners who attended his ministry? And did he ever give any hint that they should be understood in a milder sense? Have not the apostles followed their Lord in the same dreadful display of the sharp and ever-during punishments of hell? And have they taught us to qualify these terrors by gentler interpretations of them? And have not such kind of discourses been abundantly blessed in the providence of God, both in ancient and later ages, to awaken and save multitudes of the souls of men?

How many holy and happy spirits are now rejoicing before God, and before the throne of his love, and encompassed with all the joys of immortality, who owe the beginnings of their repentance, and the first turn of their souls towards faith and salvation to such words of terror as these? How many of the saints on high have been first awakened from their deadly sleep in sin by the ministrations of this eternal vengeance of God? How many have been frighted out of their indolence at first by the discovery of these everlasting horrors of conscience and agonies of soul? The dread of the worm that never dies has affrighted their consciences from a course of sin; the fiery indignation which shall never be quenched has flashed in their bosoms from the lips of the preacher, and has set them all over trembling, and filled all their inward powers with dismay and anguish: their tongue has broke into loud and earnest inquiries, "Who shall deliver me from this eternal death? How shall I escape this everlasting wrath to come?" And the Spirit of God by degrees has led them to Jesus, and his atoning blood, his gospel, his righteousness

and his converting grace, as the only way of deliverance and salvation.

How unreasonable a thing is it for ministers in their preaching to soften these terrors of the Lord, to cut short these endless horrors and anguish, and to mitigate the miseries of hell and damnation, since even all that length and eternity in which Christ and his apostles preached these terrors, have not been sufficient to reclaim mankind from their iniquities; but multitudes of them, in the face of all these threatenings, still persist in the broad way to destruction and death.

Can we possibly do any honour to the ministry of our blessed Lord, or is there any real service done to the souls of men by our fond and vain reasonings to shorten these sorrows, and put a period to these threatened torments? Will the blessed Jesus, when he sits on the throne of judgment, give us thanks for running counter to the language of his own ministry and for daring to contradict his denounced vengeance?

By the various expressions and representations of this matter in scripture, in such solemn and dreadful language, must I not suppose that the blessed God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, designed and intended, that mankind should believe the pains and punishments of hell will be eternal? Can I then be censured for endeavouring to establish and promote the awful doctrine which both God the Father and his Son intended should be believed, and by which they designed to guard both the law and the gospel? A doctrine which was left on record to deter sinners from the paths of sin and destruction, and to awaken the souls and consciences of men to repentance? On the other hand, can those teachers be approved of God or good men, whose evident design is to lead the world to disbelieve this solemn and terrible warning of the great God?

Let us now proceed in these inquiries, and address ourselves to those wicked and miserable creatures, who are actually suffering this divine vengeance. Let us ask them, how they approve of this sort of preaching which withholds from the eyes, and ears, and consciences of men, the most dreadful circumstance of these horrors! Will any of the damned wretches of hell thank us for hiding so dreadful a part of these miseries from them? Will they bless us for lessening the threatened curses and indignation of God? "No," says the condemned wretch, "those preachers are worthy of my curses and not my thanks, who abated these terrors of the Lord, and shortened his threatened punishment; for they persuaded me to hope there would be an end of my misery, and thereby tempted me to venture upon those sins which I should have renounced with abomination, had I believed the words of God, and these everlasting torments. O cursed and cruel preachers, who by softening and curtailing the sentence of eternal misery, gave a sort of license to my wickedness, and broke one of the strongest bars that restrained me from sinning! It is by this sort of flattery they paved my way down to hell, and have brought me into this prison, this eternal anguish, whence there is no release."*

Say, ye who preach that the gates of hell shall one day be opened to let out the prisoners, ye who tell sinners there is a time of release for them, say, do ye expect to frighten them out of their sins by

* Some of the ancients have called those preachers, who shorten the pains of hell, the merciful or compassionate doctors: and doctor T. Burnett calls those merciless or uncompassionate, who preach the eternity of it. But I think it will appear one day, that those are truly the compassionate writers and teachers, who most effectually affright and prevent men from sin and damnation; and those who have given wicked men hope of their release from hell, will be in danger of being charged with smoothing their way to this misery, by softening the terrors of it.

lessening their fear of God and his wrath to come? Do ye hope to bring obstinate and impenitent rebels to a more speedy remorse for sin, and to begin a life of holiness, by persuading them that these terrors of God shall have an end? Can ye imagine that such vain tidings, such soothing flattery will ever melt them to repentance and love, when all the grace of the gospel mingled with the blood and tears of the Son of God will not do it? Would not this manner of preaching rather encourage them to run on still in their rebellions, and make them more regardless of their highest interest? Would it not tempt them to give a loose to their vilest inclinations, and all the flagrant and abominable enormities of their own heart, when they shall be told that these punishments, which the Bible calls everlasting, shall one day come to an end?

Besides, I believe it has been observed in every age, that the fears of this worm which never dies, and this eternal fire which shall never be quenched, have been made abundantly useful in the providence of God to lay a powerful restraint on the unruly vices of some sinners, who have never been awakened and drawn into saving penitence, or reclaimed to a life of sincere holiness. And if the restraint of this terror were taken away, how much more would all iniquity abound among those who have no inward principle of goodness?

Let us proceed then to preach the same terror which the blessed Jesus thought not unworthy of his ministry; and may the providence and the grace of God give success to our labours, both for the restraining the extravagant vices of the wicked, for the saving conversion of many sinners, and for a guard and restraint to the young and wavering Christians.*

* The late doctor Thomas Burnett, in his Latin treatise of the State of the Dead, and those who rise again, opposes the doctrine of the eternity of future punishments, and shows which of the an-

Notwithstanding all the express language of scripture on our side of the question, and all our arguments drawn from it; yet there are some of the reasoners and the disputers of this world, who will still suppose that it is more for the honour of God, and for the glory of our blessed Saviour, for ministers to dwell always upon the promises of the new covenant, and the riches of the grace of Christ, and the overflowing measures of the love of God, in order to save sinful men. "Surely," say they, "preachers have tried long enough what the words of terror will do; let us now allure sinful men to be reconciled to God by a ministry of universal love and grace; and let us see whether the boundless compassions of a God, in putting a final period to the miseries of his guilty creatures after a certain number of years, will not draw sinners with a sweeter violence to the love and obedience of their Maker, than all this doctrine of severity and terror."

cient fathers seem to have been of the same opinion with him: but he tells us, that these ancient fathers, when they treated of this subject, often gave the same advice to others, which he himself gives in these words: "Whatsoever you determine within yourself, and in your own breast, concerning these punishments, whether they are eternal or not, yet you ought to use the common doctrine and the common language when you preach or speak to the people, especially those of the lower rank, who are ready to run headlong into vice, and are to be restrained from evil only by the fear of punishment: and even among good Christians, there are infants to be nourished with milk; nor is their diet to be rashly changed, lest through intemperance they fall into diseases."

And he adds in the margin, "Whosoever shall translate these sentiments into our mother tongue, I shall think it was done with an evil design and to bad purpose." So that if this were a true doctrine, yet the learned author agrees, that neither the holy writers of the Bible, nor the fathers, think it proper that the bulk of the people should know it. But if it should not be translated, I would ask, why did the author write it, and leave it to be published? Did he suppose all men and boys, who understood Latin, to be sufficiently guarded against the abuse of such an opinion.

In the first place I answer, That surely Jesus himself, who is the prime minister of his Father's kingdom, and the divinest messenger of his love, knew better than we do how to pay the highest honour to his heavenly Father, and to display his own grace. Surely he was well acquainted with the best way to begin with sinners in order to their reconciliation to God, and knew also the most effectual avenues to the consciences of sinful creatures, incomparably beyond what any of us can pretend to. Had he not as tender a sense of the honour of his Father's mercy, as warm a zeal for the glory of his own grace and gospel, and as wise and melting a compassion for the souls of men as the best of us can boast of? And yet he thought it proper to lay the foundation of his own, and his apostles' ministrations of grace, in this language of terror, in these threatenings of eternal punishment. And in the course of his providence throughout all ages he has, in some measure, made this doctrine successful to recover souls from the snares of the devil, and to enlarge his own heavenly kingdom.

But I answer farther, It must be granted that the tempers of men are various, and it is possible that some may be of so ingenuous and refined a disposition, that the words of love and grace, without any terror, might reach their hearts, and through the influences of Heaven, touch them effectually; but as for the bulk of mankind, while they continue in their sins, daily experience convinceth us, that they are best awakened by the terrors of the Lord, by a representation of the worm which never dies, and the fire which shall not be quenched. I never knew but one person in the whole course of my ministry who acknowledged, that the first motions of religion in their own heart arose from a sense of the goodness of God, and that they were gently and sweetly led at first to this inquiry, "What shall I render to

the Lord who hath dealt so bountifully with me?" But I think all besides, who have come within my notice, have rather been first awakened by the passion of fear to fly from the wrath to come.

If therefore we will practise according to the example of Jesus, the greatest and the wisest prophet of his church, and his holy apostles, and the best of preachers in all ages who have followed him, if we would obey the dictates of long experience, and our best observations on the methods of converting grace, I think we must proceed to denounce these eternal terrors of the Lord against the transgressors of his law and the despisers of his gospel. This seems to be the appointed and most effectual way to rouse their consciences to seek a deliverance from the curses of the law, which carry in them everlasting punishment. This appears to be the first spring of religion in sinful men, and the first motive to receive the glad tidings of salvation which are displayed in the New Testament. This spurs on their passions to escape the vengeance of God, by flying to his gospel, where there is rich and abundant grace to encourage the hope of rebellious creatures in their returns to God by Jesus Christ the Saviour. To Jesus, who is the awful messenger of his Father's terrors, and the prime minister of his love, be glory and honour to everlasting ages. Amen.

DISCOURSE XIV.

THE CONQUEST OVER DEATH.

A FUNERAL DISCOURSE.

In memory of Lady Hartopp

INTRODUCTION.

I PERSUADE myself that none of you are unacquainted with that mournful providence that calls me to the service of this day.* The words which were borrowed from the lips of the dying, I am desired to improve for the instruction and comfort of those that live. They are written in

1 COR. xv. 26.

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

When a nation has lain for whole ages under the power of some mighty tyrant, and has suffered perpetual ravages from his hands, what gladness runs through the land, at the sure prediction of his ruin! and how is every inhabitant pleased, while he hears of the approaching downfal of his great enemy! "For this is he that hath slain my father or my mother, my children, or my dearest relatives, and is

* Nov. 9th, 1711, Lady Hartopp died, and this discourse was delivered at Stoke-Newington, November the twenty-fifth following.

still making havoc of the remnant of my friends, while I myself stand in hourly danger." This pleasure grows up into more perfect joy, when we are assured this is the last tyrant that shall arise, the last enemy that shall afflict us; for he shall have no successor, and we shall be for ever free. Such should be the rejoicing of all the saints, when they hear so desirable and divine a promise as the words of my text; "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

To improve this glorious proposition, let us consider these four things, with a reflection or two upon each of them.

I. How death appears to be an enemy to the saints.

II. Why it is called the last enemy, or the last that shall be destroyed.

III. How it is to be destroyed, and what are the steps or gradual efforts towards its destruction.

IV. What are the advantages that the saints receive by the destruction of this last enemy.

SECTION I.

Death an enemy even to good men.

The first inquiry is, How, or in what sense death appears to be an enemy to the saints.

That it is in general an enemy to human nature, is sufficiently evident from its first introduction into the world; for it was brought in as an execution of the first threatening given to Adam in Paradise, Gen. ii. 17: "In the day thou eatest thou shalt die." It came in as a punishment for sin, and every punishment in some respect opposes our interest and our happiness. When it seized on man at first, and planted the seeds of mortality in his nature, he then

began to be deprived of that peace and health, that vigour and immortality which he possessed before his fall, till at last it brought him down to the dust; and ever since, all the sons of Adam have found and felt it an enemy to their natures.

To sinners indeed it is an enemy in a more dreadful sense, and its attendants are more terrible a thousand-fold. For besides all the common miseries of the flesh which they sustain, it delivers over their spirits into everlasting misery; it finishes their reprieve, and their hope for ever; it plunges them at once into all the terrors of a most awakened conscience, and cuts them off from all the amusements and cares of this life, which laid their guilt and their conscience asleep for a season. Death consigns over a sinner to the chains of the grave, and the chains of hell together, and binds and reserves him a prisoner of despair for the most complete torments of the second death.

But I would confine my discourse here only to believers, for it is with respect to them this chapter is written. I know death is often called their friend, because it puts an end to their sins and sorrows; but this benefit arises only from the covenant of grace, which sanctifies it to some good purposes to the children of God. It is constrained to become their friend in some instances, contrary to its own nature, and original design; but there is reason enough, if we take a survey of its own nature, and its present appearances, to call it an enemy still, upon these following accounts.

I. Death has generally many terrible attendants and forerunners when it comes; terrible to nature and the flesh of the most exalted Christians.

Here, should I begin to describe the long and dismal train of death, the time would fail me. Shall I mention the sickness and the pain, the sharp anguish of the body, and sometimes the sharper methods of

medicine to relieve it, all which prove useless and vain in that day? Shall I recount the tedious and uneasy hours, the tiresome and sleepless nights, when the patient longs for the slow return of the morning: and still when the light breaks, he finds new uneasiness, and wishes for the shadow and darkness again? Shall I speak of the dulness of the natural spirits, and the clogs that hang heavy upon the soul in those hours; so that the better part of man is bound and oppressed and shut up, and cannot exert itself agreeable to the character of an intellectual being?

Besides all the designs of the mind are interrupted and broken in death; all that the saint intended to do for God, is cut off at once, and his holy purposes are precluded, which often adds to the trouble of a dying Christian? Psal. cxlvi. 4: "When man returns to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish."

Shall I put you in mind of the sighs and sorrows of dearest friends that stand around the bed all in tears, and all despairing? Shall I speak of the last convulsions of nature, the sharp conflict of the extreme moments and the struggling and painful efforts of departing life, which none can know fully but those that have felt them, and none of the dead come back to give us an account? Is it possible for us to survey these scenes of misery, and not to believe that the hand of an enemy has been there? The bodies of the saints are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and the members of Christ, 1 Cor. vi. 15, 19. Death murders these bodies, these members of the Lord, and ruins these temples to the dust, and may well be called their enemy upon this account.

2. Death acts like an enemy when it makes a separation between the soul and the body. It divides the nature of man in halves, and tears the two constituent parts of it asunder.

Though this becomes an advantage to the soul of

the saint through the covenant and appointment of grace, yet to have such an intimate union dissolved, between flesh and spirit, carries something of terror in it; and there may be an innocent reluctance in the nature of the best Christian against such an enemy as this; therefore St. Paul, in 2 Cor. v. 4, does not directly desire to be unclothed, but rather to be clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life; that is, to be translated at once into an immortal state. The soul and body have been long acquainted with each other, and the soul has performed almost all its operations by the use of the senses and the limbs; it sees by the eye, it hears by the ear, it acts by the hand, and by the tongue it converses. Now to be separated at once from all these, and to be at once conveyed into a new strange world, a strange and unknown state, both of being and action, has something in it so surprising, that it is a little frightful to the nature of man, even when he is sanctified and fitted for heaven.

And as the soul is dismissed by death into a state of separation, so the body, like a fallen tabernacle, is forsaken, lies uninhabited and desolate. Shall I lead your thoughts back to the bed where your dear relatives expired? and give you a sight of the dead, whose beauty is turning apace into corruption, and all the loveliness of countenance fled for ever? The body, that curious engine of divine workmanship, is become a moveless lump; death sits heavy upon it, and the sprightliness and vigour of life is perished in every feature and in every limb. Shall we go down to the dark chambers of the grave, where each of the dead lie in their cold mansions in beds of darkness and dust? The shadows of a long evening are stretched over them, the curtains of a deep midnight are drawn around them, the worm lies under them, and the worm covers them.

A saint is no more exempted from all these fright-

ful attendants of death than a sinner is. Those eyes that have been perpetually lifted up to the God of heaven in prayer, lie closed under ground. That tongue that has spoken much for God, in the world, lies silent in death. Those hands that have ministered to the necessities of the saints, and those feet that have gone often to the house of God, death has confined them in his chains. Those natural powers that have been active in the service of the gospel, can speak, can move, can act no more. But I need not recite these things to you, the images of them are too fresh and painful, and sit too heavy upon your remembrance.

3. Death is an enemy to the saint, so far as it hinders him from the enjoyment of his perfect heaven, for it keeps one part of him in the grave for many years or ages.

Let us think of the dust of the ancient martyrs, the dust of the apostles, and the holy prophets; let us look many ages backward to the dust of David, and Abraham, and Noah, to the dust of Adam the first of men; how long have their souls waited in heaven, as it were in a widowed estate? How long has their flesh been mingled with common earth, and lain confined under the bands of death, useless to all the glorious purposes of their formation, and their being? A tedious extent of time! Four or five thousand years, wherein they have done nothing for God in the body, and in the body received nothing from God? For death hinders a believer from some of the business of heaven, and some of the blessedness of it.

(1.) From some of the business of heaven: it is only the soul that is then received to glory, and dwells there alone for a season, while death keeps the body prisoner in the grave; it is only the soul that glorifies its Maker in that upper world, the world of spirits, for the flesh lies silent in the dust; the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee, O Lord;

Isa. xxxviii. 18. The body is redeemed with the blood of Christ as well as the soul, but death puts fetters upon it, and forbids it to serve its Redeemer.

(2.) The believer is restrained also by death from some of the blessedness of heaven; it is only the soul enjoys the delight, and that too only in its abstracted nature, and pure intellectual capacity; it is cut off by death from all that rich variety of pleasure which rises from its communion with so noble a frame as is the body of man. It has no senses to receive the satisfactions that arise from the material part of heaven; it has no eyes to behold the glorified flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ; no ears to hear his voice; no tongue to converse with its Saviour. And though we are sure there is a holy correspondence between Christ Jesus and separate souls, for we are said to be present with the Lord when we are absent from the body, 2 Cor. v. 8, yet this correspondence cannot be so complete and glorious, as it shall be, when with our eyes we shall see God in the form of a man.

It is granted, that the separate heaven of souls is abundant pleasure beyond what we can now conceive or express; and our friends, departed in the faith, enjoy the delightful presence of their Lord, and the heavenly converse of their fellow-spirits. That honoured and deceased saint, whom we this day mourn, dwells with that Jesus with whom she had long been acquainted; she converses with him in heaven, whom she loved much upon earth; she finds herself safe for ever in his hands, to whose care she committed her immortal concerns; and she rejoices in the sight of him above, with whom she held many hours of sweet correspondence by faith here below. Doubtless also, she holds sweet conversation with the holy souls that went to heaven before her. A soul so greatly desirous of spiritual discourse as she was, so constantly prepared for pious conference and mutual communications of sacred knowledge, must needs

enjoy that privilege and that pleasure, in that upper world, where there is nothing all around her, but what is holy and divine. But it is certain she cannot enjoy that perfection of humble society with Christ in his glorified human nature, nor with fellow saints, while she is deprived of one part of herself, her body lying silent and moveless in the prison of the grave; and she yet waits for the more complete satisfaction of all her hopes, when death, her last enemy, shall be destroyed, and her body redeemed from the dust, together with the bodies of all the saints. This leads me to the next particular.

4. Death is an enemy to believers, because it divides them for a season from the company of their known and valuable friends, and parts the dearest relatives asunder.

Though dying saints are transmitted into better company, even to the spirits of the just made perfect, yet it is a mournful thought to be separated so long from those whom they loved with so strong and just an affection. It adds a sharpness even to the last agonies, when we think we must leave parents, children or friends behind us, whom we love so tenderly; that we must leave them amidst the sorrows and the temptations of a vain world and a corrupt age; that we must leave them struggling with all the difficulties, the hardships, and the dangers that attend a Christian in his travels through this wilderness, and not see their faces again in the flesh, nor converse with them in the manner we were wont to do, till the heavens be no more.

Upon this account also, death is a worse enemy to those that survive, for they sustain the greatest loss; it deprives them of their dear and delightful relatives without any recompense; for the world grows so much the more undesirable to a saint by the death of every friend. Children are torn away from the embraces of their parents, and the wife is seized from the

bosom. This is, as it were, tearing the flesh asunder of those whose hearts are joined; this gives occasion to bitter sorrows, to long and heavy complaints. How suddenly are we sometimes deprived of the desires of the eyes, and the comforts of life, the ornaments and the supports of our earthly state? And we have lost all their love, and their counsel, and their care; all their sweet sympathy of joys and sorrows, all their agreeable conversation and heavenly advice. What a tedious way have we to walk through without such a guide or helper? We have lost the benefit of their watchful eye, their holy jealousy for our souls, their fervent and daily prayers. But there are records in heaven, where all the prayers of the saints are kept; and God often turns over his register, and in distant successive years, pours down blessings upon the posterity, and multiplies his graces amongst them, in answer to the requests that were offered up on earth by the saints that are now with God.

5. The last reason I shall mention to prove death an enemy to the saints, is the terror that it fills the mind with long beforehand. There are but few that in their best estate on earth, are got quite above these terrors, and there are none can say, I have been always free from them; so that in the younger days of their Christianity at least, all have been afraid of death; and these fears are enemies to our peace. Some spend all their lives in this bondage of fear, and that upon different accounts.

A Christian of weaker faith cries out within himself, "How shall I pass that awful moment that sets my soul naked before the eyes of a holy God, when I know not whether I am clothed with the righteousness of his Son or not, whether I shall stand the test in that day? I dread that solemn, that important hour that shall put me into an unchangeable state of miseries that are infinite, or of infinite bless-

edness. How shall I that am a sinner stand before that tribunal and that Judge in whose sight no mortal can be innocent? My evidences for heaven are dark and cloudy, that I cannot read them; they have been often sullied with fresh guilt, and I doubt whether I am new-born or not, or reconciled to God. And what if I should be mistaken in this affair of the greatest moment? The mistake can never be rectified; therefore I shake at the thoughts of death, that hour of decision; for my faith is weak."

Another saint of a strong and lively faith, but of a timorous temper, cries out, "How shall I bear the agonies and the pangs of death? I am not afraid to enter into eternity; the grace of Christ, and his gospel, have given me hope and courage enough to be dead; but I am still afraid of dying; it is hard and painful work: how shall I sustain the sharp conflict? I shiver at the thoughts of venturing through that cold flood that divides betwixt this wilderness and the promised land."

Another Christian is too much unacquainted with the world of spirits, with the nature of the separate heaven, with the particular business and blessedness of holy souls departed; and he is afraid to venture out of this region of flesh and blood, into a vast and unknown world. Though he has a good hope through grace, that he shall arrive safe at heaven; yet the heavenly country is so unknown a land, and the valley of entrance to it so dark, that he fears to pass into it through the shadow of death.

Another is terrified at the thoughts of death, because he knows not how to part with his dear relatives in the flesh, and to leave them exposed to an unkind age and a thousand dangers. "If I had none to leave behind me, I could die with cheerfulness; but while I think of such a separation the thought of death has terror in it."

Thus upon various accounts a good man may have

fearful apprehensions of dying; and that which carries so much terror about it, may well be called an enemy.

Before we proceed any farther, let us make two reflections on the first general head.

Reflection 1. If death be an enemy to the best of men in so many respects, then we may infer the great evil of sin; for it was sin that brought death into this our world; Rom. v. 12: "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

We are too ready to conceive a slight opinion of the evil of sin, because it is so common to the best of men, and so constant an attendant on human nature daily and hourly; we entertain too gentle and harmless thoughts of it, because its biggest evil is of a spiritual kind and invisible; we see not that infinite Majesty which it dishonours, that spotless holiness of God which it offends, the glory and perfection of that law which is broken by it; we can take but short and scanty notices of the injury that it does to God the supreme Spirit, while we are shut up in tabernacles of flesh. But here in these scenes of death, we may survey the sensible and mighty injury that sin has done to the nature of man, and thence infer how offensive it is to God. By our eyes and our ears, we may be terribly convinced, that it is no little evil that could occasion such spreading and durable mischief.

We cannot frame a just notion of what man was in his state of perfect innocency, in his original beauty, and honour, and immortal frame; and therefore we cannot so well judge of the vastness of the loss which we sustain by sin; but we can see and feel the formidable attendants of death, and learn and believe that it is a root of unknown poisoned bitterness, that

has produced such cursed fruit; especially if we remember that all the sorrows before described fall upon the saints themselves, even where sin is pardoned, and death has lost its sting. But if we descend, in contemplation to the endless and unknown misery that waits upon the death of a sinner, and say, All these are the effects of sin; how inexpressibly dreadful will the cause appear! The wise man has pronounced them fools, by inspiration, that make a mock at such mischief, Prov. xiv. 9.

Reflection 2. We may here learn the greatness of the love of Christ, that would venture into the land of death, and conflict with his mighty enemy, and yield to the power of it for a season, for our sakes. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," John xv. 13: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he died for us;" 1 John iii. 16; Rom. v. 8.

Many terrible attendants of death did our Lord meet and struggle with beyond what any of his saints can feel. Death, like a lion, ran furiously upon him, as it does upon a sinner, its proper prey. He met death in its full strength and dominion, for he had all our sins upon him; and death had its own sharp sting when our Lord entered the combat. There was the wrath of God which was threatened in the broken law to mingle with his pangs and agonies of nature; this made his soul exceeding sorrowful; all his inward powers were amazed, and his heart oppressed with heaviness: Mark xiv. 33, 34. He was almost overwhelmed in the garden, before the thorns or the nails came near him; and on the cross he complains of the forsaking of God, his almighty Friend, when death his mighty enemy was just upon him; and "All this (saith he to every believer) I bore for thy sake: my love was stronger than death."

SECTION II.

DEATH IS THE LAST ENEMY.

I proceed now to the second general proposed, and that is to inquire, in what sense death is said to be the last enemy, or the last that shall be destroyed: for we may join this word last, either to death, or to destruction; and in each sense it affords comfort to the saints.

1. It is the last enemy that the saints have to grapple with in this world. The three great adversaries of a Christian are the flesh, the world, and the devil, and they assault him often in this life. Death comes behind and brings up the rear: the saint combats with this enemy, and finishes all the war. Every believer has enlisted under the banner of Christ, who is the Captain of his salvation. When he first gives himself up to the Lord, he renounces every thing that is inconsistent with his faith and hope, he abandons his former slavery, undertakes the spiritual warfare, and enters the field of battle.

It is a necessary character of the followers of Christ, that they fight with the flesh, subdue corrupt nature, suppress their irregular appetites, give daily wounds to the body of sin, Col. iii. 5; Rom. viii. 13. They fight against this world; they refuse to comply with the temptations of it, when it would allure them astray from the path of duty; they defy its frowns and discouragements, and break through all its oppositions in their way to heaven, James iv. 4. They resist Satan when he tempts them to sin, and vanquish him by the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, Eph. iv. 11, 12, 17; and when he accuses them, and attempts to bring terror into their souls, they overcome him, and cast him down by the blood

of the Lamb, Rev. xii. 10, 11. They are made conquerors over these adversaries in the strength of Christ. Now the pangs of death are the last troublers of their peace; death is the last enemy that attacks them, and some have very terrible conflicts with it.

It was in these agonies, in this sharp contention, the words of my text were uttered by that honoured saint whose memory will be always precious, and whose loss we this day mourn. This cheerful language of hope, among many other scriptures, broke out from her lips. Thus lively was her faith in a dying hour. Methinks I hear her speaking the words with a firm trust in the promise; "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death;" and this encouraged her onward through the few remaining struggles of life and pain. It is as if she had said, "I have given myself up long ago to Christ, I engaged myself young in his service, I have fought with sin, I have learned to subdue flesh and sense, and to live by faith of the Son of God; I have not courted the flatteries of the world, the vain shows of life; and I have been enabled to despise the frowns of it, and been kept steadfast in my profession, in the most discouraging and the darkest times. Through the grace of Christ I have overcome the evil one; there remains but one enemy more, whose name is death; and I trust in the same grace still to obtain complete victory." Rejoice, dear relatives, let all the friends of the deceased rejoice, her name is now written down in heaven amongst the overcomers.

2. Death may be called the last enemy because it is not utterly destroyed till the resurrection, till Christ hath done all his work upon earth, till he has subdued all his other adversaries, and made use of death as his slave to destroy many of them. It is in this sense, especially, that the words of my text were written by St. Paul, 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25: "Then

cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and all power; for he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

With regard to each particular Christian, all other enemies are destroyed when he dies, for whither he goes, they cannot come; he puts off the body of flesh and of sin together; he leaves every corruption behind him, when he ascends to the company of the spirits of the just made perfect. The smiles and the frowns of this vain and vexing world, are too far off to influence the inhabitants of heaven; and Satan, the tempter and accuser, is for ever forbid entrance at the gates of that holy city. But death holds one part of the saint in his prison, the grave; and though the departed soul has overcome the terrors of this enemy, and triumphs in this expression, "O death, where is thy sting?" yet the body is confined as a prisoner under his power: "But the hour is coming, when those that are dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and live." All the prisons of the saints shall be broken to pieces, and burnt up, and the keeper destroyed for ever.

Let us make these two reflections on the second general head of this discourse:—

Reflection 1. What abundant encouragement may we derive from hence, to engage us betimes in a war with all the other enemies of our salvation, that having overcome them, we may be assured death is the last enemy we shall meet with; and then also we may face death with a braver courage, may conflict with it with better success, may vanquish it by a lively faith, and rejoice in the prospect of its final destruction. The same armour of God, the same divine weapons, and the same almighty

assistances by which we have subdued our former adversaries, sin, Satan, and the world, shall be sufficient to gain this conquest too. We cannot begin the holy warfare too soon; none of us are too young to be assaulted by death; but let it come never so early in the morning of our days, it is the last enemy that we can fear, if we are listed in the army of Christ, and have begun the glorious war.

I would address myself to the younger branches of the mourning house, and say, Have you had such a noble example of victory over sin and death in vain? Will you basely submit to the slavery of the flesh, and yield tamely to the oppositions of this world, which were so bravely resisted by her that is gone before you? Will you love this world, that is at enmity with God, and has ever been at enmity with all the saints? Are you content to have your names for ever excluded from that honourable list of conquerors, where the names of your ancestors shine before the throne of God, and are recorded with honour in the memory of his churches? Think how dreadful a moment that will be, when you shall look death in the face, if you have not begun to wage war with sin and Satan before! How dreadful to have many enemies at once assaulting you! the lusts of your own heart, raging desires after the enjoyments of this world, the horrors of conscience, the buffetings of the devil, and the pangs of death. What will ye do in the day of such a visitation? And remember, that though death be the last enemy of the saints, it is not thus with sinners; it does but transmit them into the world of damned spirits, where enemies multiply upon them, and grow more outrageous. Besides the bitter anguish of their own conscience, they have the wrath of a God whom they have long provoked, and the malice of evil angels their tormentors, to conflict with to all eternity. "But we

hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak;" Heb. vi. 9.

Reflection 2. What divine comfort is there in my text for aged Christians and dying saints, who have been watchful and vigorous in their war with sin, and gained many victories over this world and Satan, who is called the god of it! What a delightful view such persons have, when upon the borders of life! Bear up with divine boldness, ye heirs of glory, for you have but one adversary more to fight with; let your faith, and patience, and holy courage hold out a little longer, and victory and triumph are yours for ever. There is no enemy lies in ambush behind the tomb; when you have passed the bars of death, you are out of the reach of all adversaries. Beyond the grave the coast is all clear for ever; the country flows with rich and untasted pleasures: every inhabitant is an inward friend, and peace and joy and love smile in every countenance.

Will an old saint complain that he finds many infirmities attend his age, that his senses are feeble, that his eyes are dim, that Satan now and then arises from hell, and casts a gloom and darkness around his soul, and buffets him sorely in that darkness? Will he complain that his natural spirits are heavy, that the world is troublesome to him, and every thing in life painful? Methinks it is a consolation equal to all these sorrows, that he is just entering into the last field of battle; the last hour of controversy is begun; a few strokes more will decide the strife, and make him an eternal conqueror. "Behold I come quickly," saith our Lord, "hold fast that which thou hast gained, that no man take thy crown;" Rev. iii. 11.

SECTION III.

THE DESTRUCTION OF DEATH.

The third thing we are to inquire, is, How death is destroyed, and what are the steps, or gradual efforts towards its destruction.

The person that has this honour put upon him, to subdue this universal tyrant, is our Lord Jesus Christ; so the words inform us all round my text. Though his mediation for sinners was sufficient to have prevailed with God to destroy death at once, yet it was agreed upon in the eternal counsels, that for wise ends and purposes it should be done by degrees. His blood was of sufficient value to have procured for his elect a deliverance from every enemy at once, and a translation to heaven as soon as they were born; but it was wisely concerted betwixt the Father and the Son, that we should pass through temptations, difficulties, and death itself; that by feeling the sharp assaults of our enemies, we might be better acquainted with the greatness of our salvation, and pay a larger tribute of thanks and honours to our deliverer.

The steps whereby death is destroyed, are these:—

1. It is subdued by the death of Christ; its sting was then taken away, that is, the guilt of sin, 1 Cor. xv. 55—57: "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Which verses may be thus explained: Death was the punishment threatened by the law for sin, but Christ, as our surety, having sustained the execution of that threatening, and answered the law by a satisfaction equal to the offence, death has no more power over him. God has raised him up,

"having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it;" Acts ii. 24. And as Christ by his dying is said to "finish transgression, and make an end of sin," because he has taken away its power to condemn believers, though he has not yet utterly destroyed its being; so he is said to have "abolished death," 2 Tim. i. 10, because he has so far diminished and made void its power, that it shall not do any final mischief to the saints. It is like a serpent whose sting is taken away, and whose teeth are broken out; it may fright us, and do us some injury, but it cannot inflict a venomous or fatal wound. Now the believer, by a lively faith, shares in this victory of Christ over death, and gives thanks to God for it. He knows that though it may hurt his body, and bring it down to the grave for a season, yet it cannot send the soul to destruction, nor confine the body to the dust any longer than Christ shall permit.

2. Death is taken captive and enslaved by Christ at his resurrection and ascension, and made to serve his holy purposes; Psal. lxviii. 18: "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive." This is spoken of our Lord Jesus, who has taken into his own dominion death and the devil, who led the world captive. The enemy is not escaped out of the hands of this conqueror, but is put under his yoke, and constrained into his service.

Death, in its first character, was the very threatening and curse of the law of God, and includes in it all misery? but Christ, having borne the curse, has redeemed his people from it: Gal. iii. 13. And now he has taken as many as he pleases of the threatenings and terrors of the law into his own new covenant, the covenant of grace; and has sanctified their nature, and made them become blessings to the saint; "He has turned the curse into a blessing;" Deut. xxiii. 5, so that afflictions, and pains,

and sorrows, and death itself are no longer a curse to them, for they are ordained by the wisdom and grace of Christ to promote their best interest.

Death, in its original design, was the under-servant of God's avenging justice; it was the jailer to bring the soul out of the body before the divine tribunal, there to receive its condemnation to hell. It was the executioner both to torment and to destroy the flesh, and send the spirit into everlasting misery. But Christ having answered all the demands of this avenging justice, has also purchased the sovereignty over death; and though sometimes, when it seizes a saint, it may for the present signify his displeasure, as in 1 Cor. xi. 30, yet it always fulfils the designs of his love, and conveys them into his own delightful presence; therefore as soon as we are absent from the body, we are said to be present with the Lord, 2 Cor. v. 8, and when we depart from the flesh, it is to be with Christ; Phil. x. 23. Death was ordained at first to be a slave to Satan; by the righteous appointment of God, both death and the devil are executioners of his wrath; and Satan is said to have some power over death, Heb. ii. 14. But Christ, by dying, has subdued Satan, spoiled him of his destroying weapons, has made void his authority, especially with regard to believers; he has taken death out of his power, and manages it himself; and thus he delivers them who through fear of death were held in a long and painful bondage, ver. 15.

It is in such views as these that the apostle says to the Corinthian believers, "All things are yours, things present, and things to come," this world in the joys or sorrows of it, "life and death, all are yours, and ye are Christ's," 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23. You have an interest and a share in the possessions and the power of Christ over all things, so far as may promote your happiness; Christ makes all things, (even death itself) work together for the good of his

people, Rom. viii. 28. By death he puts an end to the body of sin, and frees the soul from all those ruffling passions, those inquietudes of the blood, and disorders of nature, those strong and perverse appetites that cost the Christian so much toil to subdue, and brought him so often under guilt, darkness, and sorrow. By death he delivers the believer from the pains and infirmities of the body, the perpetual languishings of a weakly constitution, and the anguish of acute diseases. He constrains death to give the weary saint release from all the miseries of the present state, and to hide him from the fury of the oppressor. The grave is God's hiding-place from the storms and tumults of the world; "There the weary are at rest, and the wicked cease from troubling;" and instead of consigning us over to the full malice of the devil, death is made a means to convey us away from all his assaults, and translate us into that country, where he has no power to enter. And when the soul is dismissed into the bosom of a reconciled God by the ministry of death, the body is put to rest in the grave; the grave, which is sanctified into a bed of rest for all the followers of Christ, since their Lord and Master has lain there.

In the gospel of Christ, the name of death is altered into sleep. Christ, who has subdued it, seems to have given it this new name, that it might not have a frightful sound in the ears of his beloved. Though it was sometimes called sleep in the Old Testament, yet that chiefly regarded the silence, and darkness, and inactivity of the state; whereas in the New Testament, and in the twelfth of Daniel, it is called sleep, to denote that there is an awaking time. The ancient Christians, upon this account, called the church-yard where they buried the dead, *koimetérian*, a sleeping-place. And though the grave may be termed the prison of death, yet death is not lord of

the prison; he can detain the captives there only during the pleasure of Christ, for he who is alive for evermore, has the keys of death and hell, that is, of the separate state, Rev. i. 18.

Now this is the true reason why Christians have spoken so many kind things of death, which is the king of terrors to a natural man. They call it a release from pain and sin, a messenger of peace, the desired hour, and the happy moment. All this is spoken while they behold it with an eye of faith in the hands of Christ, who has subdued it to himself, and constrained it to serve the designs of his love to them.

3. When it has done all Christ's work, it shall be utterly destroyed. After the resurrection, there shall be no more dying. The saints shall rise immortal, and dwell in heaven for ever, in the complete enjoyment of all that is included in the name of LIFE. As the angel in prophecy lifts up his hand, and swears by him that lives for ever and ever, that "Time shall be no longer," Rev. x. 6, so Christ Jesus, the Lord of angels, shall, as it were, pronounce with a sovereign voice, that "Death shall be no more." He shall send the great archangel with the trumpet of God; it shall sound through the deepest caverns of the grave, and shall summon death from its inmost recesses. The tyrant shall hear and obey, and restore all his captives out of prison; "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and live," John v. 25, 28, 29: "They that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation." After this our Lord has no employment for death, his slave; the bodies of men shall die no more; there shall be no more any state of separation between the flesh and spirit, Rev. xx. 14: "And death and hell," (or hades,) "were cast into the lake of fire;" that is, there shall be no more death, no grave, no separate

state of souls, all these shall be for ever destroyed.

Reflection 1. We may infer from this third general head, the great power and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ; we may learn the honour that is due to him from mortals; it is he that has subdued death, and that by his own dying. A wondrous method of victory! a surprising conquest! and he lives for ever to destroy it in his appointed time. How great and honourable must he be in the eyes of all mankind, who has vanquished so universal a conqueror! How desirable is his person, and how delightful the sound of his name to every believer! For he suppresses all their enemies, and shall destroy them even to the last. How well does he fulfil the great engagement! Hosea xiii. 14. I will ransom them from the power of the grave: I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plague! O grave, I will be thy destruction! Repentance shall be hid from mine eyes. Let us salute him the Prince of life, Acts iii. 15, and adore him under that character. He dispossesses death of all its dominions. He approves himself a complete Saviour of all his saints, and a Redeemer of his captive friends.

Reflection 2. We may learn also from this head of discourse, the power and excellency of the gospel of Christ, for it discovers to us how this great enemy is vanquished, and when it shall be destroyed; and thus it lays a foundation for courage at death, and gives us assurance of a joyful rising-day. Death being abolished by the mediation of Christ, immortality and life are brought to light by his gospel, 2 Tim. i. 10; that is, there is a brighter discovery of the future state, and of everlasting happiness, than ever before was given to the world.

Here in the name of Christ, and of his gospel, we may give a challenge to all other religions, and say, which of them has borne up the spirit of man so high

above the fears of death as this has done? or has given us so fair, so rational, and so divine an account how death has been overcome by one man, and how by faith in his name we may all be made overcomers? How vain are the trifles with which the heathen priests and their prophets amused the credulous multitude! What silly and insipid fables do they tell us of souls passing over in a ferry boat to the other world, and describe the fields of pleasure, and the prisons of pain in that country of ghosts and shadows, in so ridiculous a manner, that the wise men of their own nations despised the romance, and few were stupid enough to believe it all. If we consult the religion of their philosophers, they give us but a poor, lame, and miserable account of the state after death. Some of them denied it utterly, and others rave at random in mere conjectures, and float in endless uncertainties. The courage which some of their heroes professed at the point of death, was rather a stubborn indolence, than a rational and well-founded valour; and not many arrived at this hardiness of mind, except those that supposed their existence ended with their life, and thought they should be dissolved into their first atoms. Aristotle, one of the greatest men among them, tells us that futurity is uncertain, and calls death the most terrible of all terribles.

If we search into the religion of the Jews, which was a scheme of God's own contrivance and revelation to men, we find the affairs of a future world lay much in the dark; their consciences were not so thoroughly purged from the guilt of sin, but that some terrors hung about them, as appears from Heb. x. 1—3, and having so faint and obscure notices of the separate state of souls, and of the resurrection, these were the persons who in a special manner, "through the fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage," Heb. ii. 15.

But Christianity lays a fair and rational foun-

dation for our confidence and triumph in the dying hour. It shows how guilt is removed by an all-sufficient sacrifice; and makes it evident that no hell, no vengeance, no shadows of misery await the believer in that invisible world. This makes the Christian venture into it with a certain boldness, and a becoming presence of mind. The doctrine of Christ shows us how the sting of death is taken away, and calls us to fight with a vanquished enemy, a serpent without a sting; it gives us assurance that we shall rise again from the dust with bodies fresher and fairer, glorious in their frame, and their constitution immortal, for death shall be no more. Exalted by so sublime a hope, what is there in death sufficient to depress our spirits, if our faith were but equal to this admirable doctrine? The holy apostles are witnesses, the noble army of martyrs are witnesses, and many a saint in our day is a witness to this truth, and gives honour to this gospel. How many thousands have met death, and all its frightful attendants, with a steady soul, and a serene countenance, and have departed to heaven with songs of praise upon their lips, a smile upon their face, and triumph in their eyes? And this was not owing to any extravagant flights of enthusiasm, nor the fires of an inflamed fancy, but it has been performed often, and may be done daily by the force of a regular faith, on the most solid and reasonable principles; for such are the principles of the gospel of Christ.

SECTION IV.

BLESSINGS GAINED BY THE DESTRUCTION OF DEATH.

The fourth and last general head of discourse, is an inquiry into the advantages which the saints receive by the destruction of this last enemy.

This is a large and endless field, for it includes a great part of the happiness of the final heaven. But I shall attempt to mention briefly a few of the benefits that attend my text, and that without a nice distinction of particulars.

When death is destroyed, we shall share in the joy and triumph of Christ for absolute conquest over all his enemies; for there is scarcely any glory given to Christ, considered as man, but the saints are said to be humble partners in it, or at least to enjoy the resemblance. Is he appointed the Judge of all? It is promised also to the saints that they shall judge angels, and the twelve tribes of Israel. Do we suffer with him? we shall also reign with him. If we conquer death by faith, we shall rise and triumph. Here we labour and fight with many adversaries, and we think we have routed them, but they rally again, and give us fresh vexation, so that we hardly know how to attempt a song of victory on this side the grave. Besides, death still remains for our trial and conflict; but there we shall rejoice over all our enemies, subdued, destroyed, and abolished for ever.

Then God will be all in all to his saints. This is a consequent which St. Paul mentions in the verses where my text is; God will manage the affairs of his heavenly kingdom in a more immediate way than he has managed his kingdom on earth. Christ having destroyed all the enemies of his church, and presented it safe before the Father, has finished all those divine purposes for which the mediatorial kingdom was intrusted with him; then he shall resign his commission to the Father again, and the ever-blessed God shall in a more immediate and absolute manner reign over all the creation. He shall more immediately impress devils and damned spirits with a sense of infinite wrath; and with a more immediate sense of his love and eternal favour,

shall he for ever bless all the inhabitants of heaven. So much as this seems to be implied in the words of the apostle, 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25, &c. But it is impossible that in this state we should know either the full extent, or the just limitations of that promise, "God shall be all in all." Our honoured and departed friend had these words dwelling upon her heart; these were often in her lips in the days of her faith and hope, and in the hours of her passage through the dark valley; she enjoys part of the pleasure of them in her present heaven, and with pleasure she expects the more absolute accomplishment, when the resurrection shall complete the blessedness of all the saints.

Another consequent of the destruction of death, is the employment of all the powers of human nature in the service of God, and they shall be neither weak nor weary. For all the inconveniences that attend mortality shall be swallowed up and lost for ever.

Alas, how poor and imperfect is the service which our bodies yield to God in this world! How heavily do our souls complain of the clog of this flesh, and move onwards heavily in the discharge of duty! and in the grave the body is quite cut off from all service. But when death shall be dispossessed, when we shall arise from the dust, and put on bodies of glory; then with our whole natures, and with all their powers, we shall do honour to God our Creator, our Redeemer, and our King. The time will come when we shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; and the refreshments of sleep shall be no more necessary to support life. When death shall be destroyed, sleep, the image and picture of death, shall be destroyed too. There shall be nothing that looks like death in all that vital world, that world of immortality. "We shall serve the Lord day and night in his temple;" that is, continually, "for

there shall be no night there." Rev. vii. 15, 16, and xxi. 25.

Then we shall taste all the true blessedness that human nature is capable of, and that without danger of excess or sin. When God first united these two pieces of his workmanship, the soul and body, and composed a man, he designed him the subject of various pleasures, wherein each part should have been subservient to the other, to render the felicity of the creature perfect. It is sin and death that have entered into our natures, and prevented this noble design in our present state; but the counsel of the Lord shall stand. And when he raises up the body from the grave, it shall leave all the seeds of death behind it. The faculties and the senses shall awake in all their original sprightliness and vigour, and our future heaven shall be furnished with objects suited to entertain those powers, and to convey intense pleasure to glorified minds, without danger of satiety or weariness. When the time comes that "there shall be no more death, God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes; there shall be no sorrow nor crying, nor any more pain; for the former things are passed away, and he that sits upon the throne shall say, Behold I make all things new!" Rev. xxi. 4, 5.

Then shall we enjoy the constant society of our best friends, and dearest acquaintance; those that have arrived at the New Jerusalem themselves, and have assisted us in our travels thither. And we shall delightfully entertain, and be entertained with the mutual narratives of divine grace, and the wise and holy methods of Providence, whereby we have been conducted safely through all the fatigues and dangers of the wilderness to that heavenly country.

And that which shall add an unknown relish to all the former blessings, is the full assurance that we shall possess them for ever. For every one of our

enemies are then destroyed, and the last of them is death. Here on earth it is a perpetual pain to the mind to think, that those whom we love are mortal; the next moment may divide them from us far as the distance of two worlds. They are seized on a sudden from our eyes and from our embraces; and this thought allays the delight that we take in their company, and diminishes the joy; but in that world all our friends are immortal, we shall ever be with the Lord, and ever with one another too, 1 Thess. iv. 17.

May I be permitted here to make a short reflection on that mournful providence that has joined two lovely relatives in death,* and gives occasion for the sad solemnities of this day? The pious mother led the way to heaven but a few days before the pious daughter followed, each of them the parent of a reputable family, and the descendants from a progenitor,† whose name is in honour among the churches. As mutual affection joined their habitations in life, so the care of surviving friends has laid them to rest in their beds of earth together. We trust they are also joined in the world of blessed spirits on high, and they shall be joined again in the world of glorified saints in the morning of the resurrection. Death, their common enemy, has taken them both captives together; has bound in his chains the mother and the daughter; but they are prisoners of hope, and together they shall obtain a glorious release.

I would copy a line from that most beautiful elegy of David, and apply it here with more justice than the Psalmist could to Saul and Jonathan, 2 Sam. i.

* Lady Hartopp, daughter of Charles Fleetwood, Esq., and wife to Sir John Hartopp, of Newington, baronet, died Nov. 9, 1711. Mrs. Gould, their daughter, and wife to Mr. Gould, (now Sir Nathaniel Gould of Newington) died six days after, namely, Nov. 15, and left their households behind them, oppressed with double sorrows.

† Charles Fleetwood, Esq., of Norfolk.

23: "Lovely and pleasant were they in their lives, and in death they were not divided." Silent were they, and retired from the world, and unknown except to their intimate friends; but God was a witness of their hours of divine retirement. The graces of Christianity, and the virtues of domestic life (which are the proper ornaments of the sex) were the mark of their utmost aim and ambition; nor did they seek the flatteries of the court, or the city, nor affect the gaieties of a degenerate age. Humble they were, and averse from public show and noise: nor will I disturb their graves by making them the subject of public praise. In the hearts of their families, their memory, their image, and their example will live. O may the brightest and best part of their image and example live in the character and practice of all that are left behind!

What a dreadful and overwhelming thought is it to suppose that any of that honourable and numerous household should be divided asunder at the last day! Give all diligence then, my worthy friends, to make your calling and your election sure; devote yourselves to the God of your predecessors; trust in the same Saviour; tread in the same paths of holiness; and pursue the same glory. What a joy will it be to that pious lady that is gone before, to find, that those who were dear to her as her own soul have overcome sin and death, and in a blessed succession arrive at the same heaven. Let me entreat you to give her this satisfaction, and not disappoint her prayers and her hopes. Let your venerable surviving parent (who is now confined at home under sorrows and sharp pains) obtain this pleasure. Let that dear partner of her joys and cares behold the power of religion appearing and reigning in all your hearts before his eyes are closed in death. Give both of them this consolation at the appearance of Christ, that they may say, "Lord, here we are, and the children which thou

hast given us. Here we are with our ancestors, and our offspring and our kindred around us: adoring thy rich grace together, and entering together into the state of perfect glory which thou hast prepared."

It remains only that I should propose some reflections on the last head of discourse, for the meditation of this whole assembly, and especially for those that are engaged in the spiritual warfare, and proceed to daily conquests.

Shall death, with all its attendants, be destroyed for ever? And are these the blessings that shall succeed? Then enter into this joy beforehand by a lively faith, and begin the song of triumph—"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" 1 Cor. xv. 55. "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy, when I fall, I shall arise;" Micah vii. 8.

After you have fought many battles with Satan, subdued many sins, and encountered a thousand temptations with success, perhaps you find new adversaries still arising; look forward then to this joyful hour, and say, "But I shall one day be for ever free from all these toils and labours of war, for all my enemies shall be overcome, since death, the last of them, shall be subdued."

When you feel the infirmities of this mortal body hang heavy upon your spirits, and damp your devotion, read the words of this promise, and rejoice, "These pains and these languors of nature, shall one day vanish and be no more; for death, with all its train must be destroyed."

When some of your dearest friends are seized by this tyrant, and led away to the grave in his chains, while you are wounded to the very soul, remember, that Christ, your Captain, and your Saviour, shall revenge this quarrel upon your last enemy; for he has appointed the hour of his destruction. "Mourn

not, therefore, for the dead, as those that sorrow without hope, for those that sleep in Jesus, the Lord shall bring with him" when he comes; 1 Thess. iv. 13. And he shall join you together in a blessed and durable fellowship, where it shall be eternally impossible for enemies to break in upon your peace; for death, the last of them, shall be then destroyed. And the Lord has left us this comfort in the end of his sacred writings: "Surely I come quickly." Let each of us with a cheerful heart reply, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Amen.

DISCOURSE XV.

THE HAPPINESS OF SEPARATE SPIRITS.

A FUNERAL DISCOURSE.

IN MEMORY OF SIR JOHN HARTOPP, BART.

INTRODUCTION.

It is a solemn and mournful occasion that has brought me to this place this day.* Divine Providence, and the will of surviving relatives, call me to pay the last sacred and pious respect to the memory of the deceased; a worthy gentleman, and an excellent Christian, who has lately left our world in a good old age.

It is something more than ten years since I was engaged in the same service to the memory of his honoured and pious lady, when by a double and painful stroke the mother and daughter were joined in death; when the two kindred families were smitten in the tenderest part, and each of them sustained a loss that could never be repaired.†

This town was the place which they had all ho-

* Sir John Hartopp died April 1, 1722, in the 85th year of his age; and the substance of this discourse was delivered briefly at Stoke-Newington, April the 15th following.

† See a particular account, page 437, of the foregoing discourse in the margin.

noured with their habitation, and spent the largest part of their lives amongst you; but they are now become inhabitants of the heavenly city, they dwell in the world of blessed spirits, and I would lead your devoutest thoughts to follow them thither. Come, then, let our meditations take their rise from those words of the great apostle.

HEB. xii. 23.

—*The spirits of just men made perfect.*

It is a much sweeter employment to trace the souls of our departed friends into those upper and brighter regions, than to be ever dwelling upon the dark prospect, and fixing our eyes upon death, and dust, and the grave; and that not only because it gives us a comfortable view of the persons whom we mourn, and thus it relieves our most weighty and smarting sorrows; but because it leads us to consider our own best interest, and our highest hopes, and puts us in mind of the communion that we have with those blessed spirits in heaven, while we belong to the church on earth. "We are come," says the apostle, ver. 22: "We," in the gospel-state, "are come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the innumerable company of angels, to the spirits of just men made perfect."

What sort of communion it is that good men here below maintain with those exalted spirits, is not my present business to describe; therefore I apply myself immediately to the words of my text, and confine myself to them only.

And here I shall consider these four things:

I. Who are particularly designed by the spirits of the just; and here I shall make it evident the

apostle means not merely the spirits of good men, but such good spirits as are dismissed from their mortal bodies.

II. We shall inquire, Wherein consists the perfection to which they have arrived, and what are the excellencies in which they are made perfect.

III. What sort of perfection it is they enjoy, and what are the peculiar characters of it.

IV. How they arrive at this perfect state, and what influence the dismission from their bodies has towards their attainment of it.

And then conclude with a few remarks for our instruction and practice, suitable to the present providence.

SECTION I.

OF THE SPIRITS OF THE JUST.

Our first inquiry is, Whom are we to understand by the spirits of the just here spoken of?

The name of just or righteous men, taken in a large and general sense, as it is often used in scripture, signifies all those who fear and love God, and are accepted of him. In the New Testament they are frequently called saints, believers, and children of God; but in both parts of the Bible they are often described by the name of just, or righteous, and they are properly called so upon these three accounts:—

1. Their persons are made righteous in the sight of God, having their sins forgiven, and their souls justified through the death and righteousness of Jesus Christ. So the word is used, Rom. v. 18:

"By the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous." They have seen themselves all guilty and exposed to the wrath of God, they have fled to lay hold on the hope set before them, they have mourned before God and been weary of sin, they have received the great atonement, they have committed their case by a living faith to Jesus the righteous, the Surety and the Saviour of perishing sinners; and that God hath received them into his favour, and has imputed righteousness to them, even that God who is just, and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus. Now this sense cannot reasonably be excluded from the character of a saint, though the word righteous is more frequently taken in the following senses.

II. Their natures are made righteous, and sanctified by the Spirit of grace. They have a principle of grace and holiness wrought in them; so the word signifies, Eph. iv. 24: "The new man, which is created after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness." They were once sinners, disobedient and unholy, as they were born into this world; but they are born again, and made new creatures by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Their understandings are enlightened to see the dreadful evil of sin, and the divine beauty of holiness. Their wills are turned from folly and vanity, from the love of earth, and sense, and sin, to a holy contempt of the world, and a hatred of all that is sinful; from a neglect of religion to desires after God, and a delight in him; from a mere formal profession of the gospel, to the faith and love of Christ, and a zealous pursuit of holiness; and they place their highest hopes and their joys in things divine, spiritual, and eternal.

III. Their lives are righteous, and conformable to the will of God revealed in his word. So the term righteous signifies, 1 John iii. 7: "He that doth

righteousness is righteous." The just man makes it the business of his life to do works of righteousness taken in the largest sense; to worship God, to seek his glory, to obey his will, which is the rule of righteousness; to do him all the service on earth that his station and circumstances admit of, and to deal faithfully and justly among men, and do them all the good that lies in his power.

These are the just men whose spirits are spoken of in my text.

Now it is evident the apostle here means their spirits which are in heaven, and departed from these mortal bodies, because the train of blessed companions which he describes just before, leads our thoughts to the invisible world.

If we can suppose any part of these two verses to refer to earth and our present state, it must be when he says, Ye are come to mount Zion, to the city of the living God; that is, the visible church of Christ under the gospel dispensation. But then he adds, you are come also to the heavenly Jerusalem, which may probably include all the inhabitants of heaven in general; and descending to particulars, he adds, "to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the first-born, who are written in heaven;" whereby we must understand the whole visible church of God among men, if we do not confine it to those who are already of the church triumphant. And next he leads us to God the Judge of all, and to spirits of just men made perfect; that is, spirits released from flesh and blood, who have stood before God their Judge, and are determined to a state of perfection in heaven.

Besides, when St. Paul speaks of fellow Christians here on earth, it is not his manner to call them spirits, but men, or brethren, or saints, &c.; therefore by the naked and single term spirits, he distinguishes these persons from those who dwell in

mortal bodies, and raises our thoughts to the world of blessed souls, released from the wretched ties and bondage of flesh and blood, the spirits of good men departed from this earth, and dwelling in the better regions of heaven.

I would here take notice also, that the apostle perhaps in this place, chooses rather to call them just or righteous men, which is a term used frequently both in the Old and New Testament, that he might include the patriarchs and the Jewish saints, as well as the souls of departed Christians. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Noah, Daniel, and David, Job, Moses, and Elijah, dwell in that happy world, with a thousand other spirits of renown in the ancient church, as well as the spirits of those that have seen the Messiah, and believed in Jesus of Nazareth. What a noble and wondrous assembly! What an amazing and blissful society of human souls, gathered from various nations, and from all ages, and joined together in the heavenly Jerusalem, the family of God above!

I shall proceed now to the second thing I proposed.

SECTION II.

OF THEIR PERFECTION IN KNOWLEDGE, HOLINESS, AND JOY.

The second inquiry is this,—Wherein consists the perfection at which these spirits are arrived?

The word perfect cannot be taken here in its most extensive, absolute, and sublime sense, for in that sense it can belong only to God; he is and must be the sum and centre of all perfection for ever; all excellency and all blessedness in a supreme degree meet in him; none besides him can pretend to absolute perfection.

Nor is the word used here in its most sublime sense, in which it may be applied to a creature; for when the spirits of just men are made never so perfect, the blessed soul of our Lord Jesus Christ will be more perfect than they; for in all things he must have the pre-eminence, Col. i. 18.

Perfection, therefore, is taken in a comparative sense here, as in many other places of scripture. So St. Paul calls those Christians on earth perfect, who are advanced in knowledge and Christianity far above their fellows; as in 1 Cor. ii. 6: "I speak wisdom among them that are perfect." Phil. iii. 15: "Let as many as are perfect be thus minded." So that blessed souls above are only perfect in a comparative sense. They are advanced in every excellency of nature, and every divine privilege, far above all their fellow-saints here on earth.

I desire it also to be observed here, that the word perfection does not generally imply another sort of character than what a man possessed before; but a far more exalted degree of the same character of which he was before possessed.

The perfection then of the spirits of the just in heaven, is a glorious and transcendent degree of those spiritual and heavenly qualifications and blessings which they enjoyed here on earth in a lower measure; implying also a freedom from all the defects and disorders to which they were here exposed, and which are inconsistent with their present felicity.

If I were to branch it into particulars, I would name but these three, namely, (1.) A great increase of knowledge without the mixture of error. (2.) A glorious degree of holiness, without the mixture of the least sin. (3.) Constant peace and joy, without the mixture of any sorrow or uneasiness.

Let us consider them distinctly.

I. A great increase of knowledge, without the

mixture of error; and in this sense it is perfect knowledge.

Part of the happiness of spirits consists in contemplation; and the more excellent the object is which we contemplate, and the more perfect our acquaintance with it, the greater is our happiness. Therefore the knowledge of God, the infinite and eternal Spirit, is the true felicity of all the ranks of created spirits in the upper and lower worlds. What unknown and unrivalled beauties are contained in the attributes of his nature! What a heavenly pleasure is it to lose ourselves amongst the boundless perfections of his self-sufficiency and eternal existence, his wisdom, his power, his justice, his holiness, his goodness, and his truth! And what a divine harmony amongst them all!

How does the philosopher entertain and feast himself with daily discoveries of new wonders amongst the works of God, and beholds the print of the hands of his Creator on them all! What superior glories are seen by the inquiring Christian amongst the greater wonders of his grace! and he receives the discovery of them with superior delight, for his eternal life is in them. John xvii. 3: "This is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." To know the Father and the Son according to the revelation which they have given of themselves in the gospel, is not only the way to obtain life eternal, and consequently the business of the saints here below; but the knowledge of this Son and this Father in their natural glories, in their personal characters, in their sublime and mysterious relations to each other, and in their most amazing contrivances and transactions for the recovery of lost sinners, may be matter of the most pleasing inquiry, and delicious contemplation, to the angels themselves. 1 Pet. i. 12:

"These are the things which the angels desire to look into." And the spirits of the just made perfect are employed in the same delightful work; for which they have much more concern, and a dearer interest in it.

We know something of God by the light of nature. The reason that is within each of us shines like a slender candle in a private room, and gives us some twinkling and uncertain notions of our Creator. The notices that we obtain by the light of grace, or the gospel here on earth, are far brighter and surer, like the moon at midnight shining upon a dark world, or like the rise of the morning-star, and the dawning of the day. But the knowledge which departed spirits obtain of their Creator and their Redeemer in the light of glory, is far superior to that of nature and grace, as the lustre of the meridian sun exceeds the pale moon-beams, or the glimmering twilight of the morning.

This is what the apostle describes, 1 Cor. xiii. 9—12: "For we know but in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know, even as also I am known." The imperfection of our knowledge in this world consists much in this, that we are liable to perpetual mistakes. A thousand errors stand thick around us in our inquiries after truth, and we stumble upon errors often in our wisest pursuits of knowledge; for we see but through a glass darkly, but then we shall know even as we are known, and see face to face; that is, We shall have a more immediate and intuitive view of God and Christ, and

of the Holy Spirit, without such mediums as are now necessary for our instruction. We shall know them in a manner something akin to the way whereby God knows us, though not in the same degree of perfection; for that is impossible. Yet in these respects our knowledge shall bear some resemblance to the knowledge of God himself, namely, that it shall be not merely a rational knowledge, by inferences drawn from his works, not merely a knowledge by narration, or report and testimony, such as we now enjoy by his word; but it shall be such a sort of knowledge as we have of a man when we see his face, and it shall also be a certain and unwavering knowledge, without remaining doubts, without error, or mistake. O happy spirits that are thus divinely employed, and are entertaining themselves and their fellow-spirits with those noble truths and transporting wonders of nature and grace, of God and Christ, and things heavenly, which are all mystery, entanglement and confusion to our thoughts in the present state!

2. This perfection consists in a glorious degree of holiness without the mixture of the least sin; and in this sense it is perfect holiness.

All holiness is contained and summed up in the love and delightful service of God and our fellow-creatures.

When we attempt to love God here on earth, and by the alluring discoveries of grace try to raise our affections to things of heaven, what sinful damps and coldness hang heavy upon us! What counter-allurements do we find towards sin and the creature, by the mischievous influences of the flesh in this world! What an estrangedness from God do the best of Christians complain of! And when they get nearest to their Saviour in the exercises of holy love, they find perpetual reason to mourn over their distance, and they cry out often with pain at their

hearts, "What a cursed enemy abides still in me, and divides me from the dearest object of my desire and joy!" But the spirits of the just made perfect have the nearest views of God their Father, and their Saviour; as they see them face to face, so (may I venture to express it) they love them with a union of heart to heart; for he that is joined to the Lord in the nearest union in heaven, may well be called one spirit with him, since the apostle says the same thing of the saints on earth, 1 Cor. vi. 17.

As our love of God is imperfect here, so is all our devotion and worship.

While we are in this world, sin mingles with all our religious duties; we come before God with our prayers and our songs, but our thoughts wander from him in the midst of worship, and we are gone on a sudden to the ends of the earth. We go up to his temple, and we try to serve him there an hour or two; then we return to the world, and we almost forget the delights of the sanctuary, and the God we have seen there. But the spirits of the just made perfect are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple, Rev. vii. 15. And though they may not be literally engaged in one everlasting act of worship, yet they are ever busy in some glorious services for him. If they should be sent on any message to other worlds, yet they never wander from the sight of their God: for if the guardian angels of children always behold the face of our heavenly Father, Matt. xviii. 10, even when they are employed in their divine errands to our world; much more may we suppose the spirits of just men made perfect never lose the blissful vision, whatsoever their employments shall or can be.

And as our acts of worship on earth, and converse with God are very imperfect, so is our zeal and activity for God extremely defective; but it shall be ever bright and burning in the upper world.

When we would exert our zeal for God on earth, how many corrupt affections mix with that zeal and spoil it! Dead flies, that cause that noble ointment to send forth a stinking savour! How much of self, and pride, and vain ambition, too often mingles with our desires to serve Christ and his gospel! Some have preached Christ out of vain-glory, or envy; and a mixture of those vices may taint our pious ministrations. When we seem to drive furiously like Jehu to the destruction of the priests and the worship of Baal, too often the wild-fire of our lusts and passions, our envy, and wrath, and secret revenge join together to animate our chariot wheels. When we are ready to say with him, "Come and see my zeal for the Lord," perhaps God espies in our hearts too much of the same carnal mixture; for Jehu exalted the true God, that he might establish himself a king; 2 Kings x. 16. But the spirits of the just are perfect in zeal, and pure from all mixtures. Their very natures are like the angels, they are so many flames of sacred and unpolluted fire, the ministers of God that do his pleasure, and then hide their faces behind their wings; when they have done all for God, they fall down and confess they are nothing.

Temptation and sin have no place in those happy regions. These are the evils that belong to earth and hell; but within the gates of heaven nothing must enter that tempteth, nothing that defileth, Rev. xxi. 27. It is the mixture of sinful thoughts and idle words, sinful actions and irregular affections, that makes our state of holiness so imperfect here below. "We groan within ourselves, being burdened;" we would be rid of these criminal weaknesses, these guilty attendants of our lives: but the spirits above are under a sweet necessity of being for ever holy; their natures have put on perfection; the image of God is so far completed in them, that nothing contrary to the divine nature remains in all

their frame; for they see God in all the fairest beauties of his holiness, and they adore and love. They behold him without a veil, and "are changed into the same image from glory to glory," 2 Cor. iii. 18. If these words are applicable to the state of grace, much more to that of glory. They see Christ as he is, and they are made completely like him, 1 John iii. 2, which is true concerning the state of separate spirits, as well as the hour of resurrection.

As their love to God is perfect, so is their love to all their fellow-saints.

We try to love our fellow-creatures and fellow-Christians here on earth; but we have so many corrupt passions of our own, and so many infirmities and imperfections belong to our neighbours also that mutual love is very imperfect. "Love is the fulfilling of the law," Rom. xiii. 10. But we shall never fulfil that law perfectly till we are joined to the spirits of the just in glory, where there is no inhabitant without the flame of sacred love, no single spirit unlovely or unbeloved.

In those happy mansions there is no envy raised by the perfections or the honours of our neighbour spirits; no detracting thought is known there, no reproachful word is heard in that country; and, perhaps, no word of reproach is to be found in the whole heavenly language. Malice, and slander, and the very names of infamy, are unknown in those regions; and wrath and strife are eternal strangers. No divided opinions, no party-quarrels, no seeds of discord are sown in heaven. Our little angry jars and contentions have no place there, and the noise of war and controversy ceases for ever. There are no offences given, and none are taken in that world of love. Neither injury nor resentment is ever known or practised there, those bitter and fatal springs of revenge and blood. Universal benevolence runs through the whole kingdom; each spirit wishes well to his neigh-

bour as to himself; and till we arrive there, we shall never be made perfect in love, nor shall we see the blessed characters of it described in the scriptures fully copied out in living examples.

In that holy world dwells God himself, who is original love; there resides our Lord Jesus Christ, who is love incarnate; and from that sacred head flows an eternal stream of love through every member, and blesseth all the inhabitants of that land with its divine refreshments. Holiness is perfect among the spirits of the just, because love is perfect there.

Objection. But are there not several graces and virtues that belong to the saints on earth that are finished at death, and can have no room in heaven? How then can perfection of holiness in heaven consist in an increase of the same graces we practised on earth?

Answer. Yes, there are several such virtues and such graces, as faith and repentance, and godly sorrow, patience and forbearance, love to enemies, and forgiveness of injuries, &c. But all these arise from the very imperfection of our present state, from the sins and follies of ourselves or our fellow-creatures. Faith arises from the want of sight; repentance from returns of guilt; godly sorrow from the workings of sin in us; patience owes its very nature and exercise to the afflictions we sustain from the hand of God; and forbearance and forgiveness respect the injuries that we receive from our fellow-creatures. But in heaven faith, so far as it regards the absence of God and Christ, is lost in sight and enjoyment, as the light of a glimmering taper is lost in the blaze of sunbeams. Repentance of old sins, so far as it is attended with any painful or shameful passions, ceases for ever in heaven; and there is no new guilt for us to repent of: there shall be no evil working in us

to give pain to the spirit; no affliction from God to demand a patient submission; no injuries from men to be borne or forgiven.

But there is the same pious temper still continues in the spirits of the just made perfect, which was the spring of those graces on earth; and could the objects or occasions of them return, every spirit there would exercise the same grace, and that in a more glorious and perfect manner, for their very natures are all over holy.

3. The last thing I shall mention, wherein the perfection of the saints above consists, is their constant peace and exalted joy without any mixture of sorrow or uneasiness; and this is joy and peace in perfection.

If our knowledge, our love, and our holiness are imperfect on earth, our joys must be so. The mistakes and the follies to which we are liable here below, the guilt that pains the conscience, and the sin that is restless and ever working within us, will bring forth fruits of present sorrow, where they do not produce the fruit of eternal death. A saint in this world will groan under these burdens; and it is divinely natural for him to cry out, "O wretched man! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Rom. vii. 24.

Thus there are many things that are within us, and that belong to us in this world, that forbid the perfection of our joys. And besides all these, we are attached and tied down to many other uneasinesses, while we dwell on earth.

This world is a fair theatre of the wisdom and power of God, but it is hung round and replenished with temptations to fallen man, proper for a state of trial; soft and flattering temptations, that by the senses are ever drawing away the soul from God and heaven, and breaking in upon its divine repose and joy; and while we are surrounded with a thousand

dangers, we cannot be said to dwell in perfect peace. The follies and the crimes of others afflict the soul of a good man, and put him to pain, as the righteous soul of Lot was vexed in Sodom from day to day with their unlawful deeds, 2 Pet. ii. 8. The greater vexations, and the little teazing accidents of life that attend us, disturb the sacred rest of the saint, and ruffle or wound his spirit. And the best of men on this account are sometimes ready to cry out with David, Psal. cxx. 5, 6: "Wo is me that I dwell in Meshech, and sojourn in the tents of Kedar; my soul hath long dwelt with them that hate peace. O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest." Psal. lv. 6.

And sometimes God himself is absent from the soul that longs after him; he hides his face, and then who can behold it? We are smitten with a sense of sin, and the conscience is restless. We wander from thing to thing in much confusion of spirit; we go from providences to ordinances, from one word in the Bible to another, from self-examination and inward guilt to the blood of Christ, and the mercy of the Father; and it may be outward sorrows fall on us at the same time, guilt and judgment attend us at once; the deep of affliction calls to the deep of sin at the noise of the floods of divine anger, Psal. xlii. 7. We are kept in the dark for a season, and we see not the light of his countenance, nor know our own interest in his love. We "go forward," as Job did, "but he is not there; and backward, but we cannot perceive him," &c. All the comfort that a good man has at such a season, is to appeal to God, that "he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me," I humbly hope "I shall come forth as gold." Job xxiii. 8, 9, 10.

But the spirits of the just made perfect, are in peaceful and joyous circumstances. They know God, for they see his face; they know that they love

him, for they feel and enjoy it as the warmest and sweetest affection of their hearts; and they are sure God loves them too; for every moment they taste his love, and live upon it in all the rich varieties of its manifestation.

O what unknown and endless satisfactions of mind arise from a full assurance of the love of God? What tongue can express, or what heart can conceive the sacred pleasure that fills every soul in heaven, under the immediate impressions of divine love? When the poor trembling doubting believer, that knew himself to be infinitely unworthy of the favour of God, or of the meanest place in his house, shall be acknowledged as a son in the midst of his Father's court on high, and amongst millions of congratulating angels!

No cloud shall ever interpose, no melancholy gloom, no shadow of darkness shall ever arise in those regions; for the countenance of God, like the sun in its highest strength, shall shine and smile upon them for ever. And through the length of all their immortality, there shall not be the least interruption of the sweet intercourse of love, on God's side, or on theirs.

In that world there is no sorrow, for there is no sin; "The inhabitants of that city, (of the heavenly Jerusalem,) shall never say, I am sick; for the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity," Isaiah xxxiii. 24. When the righteous are dismissed from this flesh, they enter into peace, their bodies rest in their beds of earth, and their spirits walk in heaven, each one in his own uprightness, Isa. lvii. 2.

And as there is no sin within them to render them uneasy, so there is no troublesome guest, no evil attendant without them, that can give them fear or pain; no sinners to vex them, no tempter to deceive them, no spirit of hell to devour or destroy; Isa. xxxv.

9, 10: "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

God himself shall never be absent, and then they cannot be unhappy. "They behold his face in righteousness, and they are satisfied when they awake with his likeness," Psal. xvii. 15. When they leave this world of dreams and shadows, and awake into that bright world of spirits, they behold the face of God, and are made like him, as well as when their bodies shall awake out of the dust of death in the morning of the resurrection, formed in the image of the blessed Jesus. That glorious scripture in Rev. xxi. 3, 4, (be the sense of it what it may) can never be fulfilled in more glory on earth than belongs to the state of heaven. "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

The saints above see their blessed Lord and Saviour, in all his exalted glories, and they are with him where he is, according to his own prayer and his own promise, John xvii. 24, and xiv. 3, "They are absent from the body, and present with the Lord." They have esteemed him on earth above all things, and longed after the sight of his face, whom having not seen they loved, 1 Pet. i. 8, but now they behold him, the dear Redeemer that gave his life and blood for them, they rejoice with joy much more unspeakable and full of superior glory.

Thus I have shown wherein this perfection of spirits in heaven consists. It is a high and glorious degree of all those excellencies and privileges they were blessed with on earth, without any mixture of the contrary evil. It is a perfection of knowledge, holiness, and joy.

And canst thou hear of all this glory, O my soul, and meditate of all this joy, and yet cleave to earth and the dust still? Hast thou not often mourned over thy ignorance, and felt a sensible pain in the narrowness, the darkness, and the confusion of thy ideas, after the utmost stretch and labour of thought? How little dost thou know of the essence of God, even thy God, and how little of the two united natures of Jesus thy beloved Saviour! How small and scanty is thy knowledge of thyself, and of all thy fellow-spirits, while thou art here imprisoned in a cottage of clay! And art thou willing to abide in this dark prison still, with all thy follies and mistakes about thee? Does not the land of light above invite thy longing and awaken thy desires: those bright regions where knowledge is made perfect, and where thy God and thy Redeemer are seen without a veil?

And is not the perfect holiness of heaven another allurement to thee, O my soul? Dost thou not stretch thy wings for flight at the very mention of a world without temptation and without sin? How often hast thou groaned here under the burden of thy guilt, and the body of death? How hard hast thou wrestled with thy inbred iniquities? An hourly war, and a long toilsome conflict! How hast thou mourned in secret, and complained to thy God of these restless inward enemies of thy peace? And art thou so backward still to enter into those peaceful regions where these enemies can never come, and where battle and war are known no more, but perfect

and everlasting holiness adorns the inhabitants, and crowns of victory and triumph?

O the shattered and imperfect devotion of the best saints on earth! O the feeble shattering efforts of praise! What poor hallelujahs we send up to heaven on notes of discord, and as it were, on broken strings! Art thou not willing, O my soul, to honour thy God and thy Saviour with sweeter harmony? And yet what a reluctance dost thou show to enter into that world of joy and praise, because the dark shadow of death hangs over the passage? Come, awake, arise, shake off thy fears; and let the sense and notice of what the spirits of the just above enjoy, raise thy courage, and excite thee to meet the first summons with sacred delight and rapture.

But I fear I have dwelt too long upon these three last particulars, because they are matters of more obvious notice, and more frequent discourse; yet they are so entertaining that I knew not how to leave them. But I would not spend all my time on common topics, while I am paying honour to the memory of an uncommon Christian.

I proceed therefore to the next general head.

SECTION III.

OF THE VARIOUS KINDS AND DEGREES OF THE EMPLOYMENTS AND PLEASURES OF HEAVEN.

Having shown that by the spirits of just men in my text, we are to understand the souls of all the pious and the good that have left the body; and having described their perfection as a state of complete knowledge, holiness, and joy; the third thing I am to consider, is, What sort of perfection this is, or what are some of the special characters of it. And here I beg your attention to some pleasing

speculations which are agreeable to the word of God, and to the nature and reason of things, and which have often given my thoughts a sacred entertainment.

I. It is such a perfection as admits of great variety of employments and pleasures, according to the various turn and genius of each particular spirit. For the word of perfection does not necessarily imply a state of universal and constant uniformity.

That the mind of every man here on earth has a different turn of genius, and peculiar manner of thought, is evident to every wise observer. And why should not every pious mind or spirit carry to heaven with it so much of that turn and manner, as is natural and innocent?

I grant it is a possible thing, that many different geniuses of men on earth may perhaps be accounted for by the different constitution of the body, the frame of the brain, and the various texture of the nerves, or may be ascribed to the coarser or finer blood, and corporeal spirits; as well as to different forms of education and custom, &c. These may be able to produce a wondrous variety in the tempers and turns of inclination, even though all souls were originally the same; but I dare not assert that there is no difference betwixt the souls themselves, at their first creation and union with the body. There are some considerations would lead one to believe, that there are real diversities of genius among the spirits themselves in their own nature.

God, the great Creator, hath seemed to delight himself in a rich variety of productions in all his worlds with which we are acquainted. Let us make a pause here, and stand still and survey the overflowing riches of his wisdom, which are laid out on this little spot of his vast dominions, this earthly globe on which we tread; and we may imagine the

same variety and riches overspreading all those upper worlds which we call planets or stars.

What an amazing multiplicity of kinds of creatures dwell on this earth! If we search the animated world and survey it, we shall find there are some that fly, some that creep or slide, and some walk on feet, or run; and every sort of animals clothed with a proper covering; some of them more gay and magnificent in their attire than Solomon in all his glory; and each of them furnished with limbs, powers, and properties fitted for their own support, convenience, and safety. How various are the kinds of birds and beasts that pass daily before our eyes!

The fields, and the woods, the forests and the deserts, have their different inhabitants. The savage and the domestic animals how numerous they are! and the fowl both wild and tame! What riches of dress and drapery are provided to clothe them in all their proper habits of nature! What an infinite number of painted insects fill the air, and overspread the ground! What bright spangles adorn their little bodies and their wings, when they appear in their summer livery! What interwoven streaks of scarlet beauty mingled with green and gold! We behold a strange profusion of divine wisdom yearly in our climate, in these little animated crumbs of clay, as well as in the animals of larger size. And yet there are multitudes of new strange creatures that we read of in the narratives of foreign countries, and what a vast profusion of entertainments for them all! How are the mountains and meadows adorned with a surprising plenty of grass and herbs, fruits and flowers, almost infinite, for the use of man and meaner animals!

In the world of waters a thousand unknown creatures swim and sport themselves, and leap with excess of life even in the freezing seas; millions of inhabitants range through that liquid wilderness with

swiftest motion, and in the wonders of their frame and nature proclaim the skill of an almighty Maker. Others of the watery kind are but half alive, and are tossed from place to place by the heaving ocean. Think of the leviathan, the eel, and the oyster, and tell me if God has not shown a rich variety of contrivance in them; and as various as their nature is, so various is the means of their life; proper beds of lodging are provided for them, and variety of food suited to uphold every nature.

Mankind is a world of itself, made up of the mingled or united natures of flesh and spirit. What an infinite difference of faces and features among the sons and daughters of men! And how much more various are the turns of their appetites, tempers, and inclinations, their humours and passions! And what glorious employment hath divine wisdom ordained for itself, in framing these millions of creatures with understandings and wills of so inconceivable a variety, so vast a difference of genius and inclination, to be the subjects of its providential government! And what a surprising harmony is there in the immense and incomprehensible scheme of divine counsels, arising from the various stations and businesses of men so infinitely diversified and distinct from one another, and centring in one great end, the divine glory! An amazing contrivance, and a design worthy of God!

Now is the pure intellectual world alone destitute of this delightful variety? Is the nature of spirits utterly incapable of this diversity and beauty, without the aids of flesh and blood? Hath the wisdom of God displayed no riches of contrivance there? And must there be such a dull uniformity no where but in the country where spirits dwell, spirits the noblest part of God's creation and dominion? Has he poured out all the various glories of divine art and workmanship in the inanimate and brutal or animal

world, and left the higher sort of creatures all of one genius and one turn and mould, to replenish all the intellectual regions? Surely it is hard to believe it.

In the world of angels we find various kinds and orders. St. Paul tells us of thrones, and dominions, and principalities, Col. i. 16, and St. Peter speaks of angels, and authorities, and powers, 1 Pet. iii. 22, and in other parts of the word of God we read the names of an archangel, a seraph, and a cherub. And no doubt, as their degrees and stations in the heavenly world differ from each other, so their talents and geniuses to sustain those different stations are very various, and exactly suited to their charge and business. And it is no improbable thought, that the souls of men differ from each other as much as angels.

But if there were no difference at first betwixt the turn and genius of different spirits in their original formation, yet this we are sure of, that God designed their habitation in flesh and blood, and their passage through this world, as the means to form and fit them for various stations in the unknown world of spirits. The souls of men having dwelt many years in particular bodies, have been influenced and habituated to particular turns of thought, both according to the various constitutions of those bodies, and the more various studies, and businesses, and occurrences of life. Surely then we may with reason suppose the spirits departing from flesh to carry with them some bent and inclination towards various pleasures and employments.

So we may reasonably imagine each sinful spirit that leaves the body, to be more abundantly inflamed with those particular vices which it indulged here, whether ambition, or pride or covetousness or malice, or envy, or aversion to God, and to all goodness; and their various sorts of punishments may

arise from their own variety of lusts, giving each of them a peculiar inward torment.

And why may not the spirits of the just made perfect have the same variety of taste and pleasure in that happy world above, according as they are fitted for various kinds of sacred entertainments in their state of preparation, and during their residence in flesh and blood? "He that has wrought us for the self-same thing is God," 2 Cor. v. 5.

In the world of human spirits made perfect, David and Moses dwell; both of them were trained up in feeding the flocks of their fathers in the wilderness, to feed and to rule the nation of Israel, the chosen flock of God. And may we not suppose them also trained up in the arts of holy government on earth, to be the chiefs of some blessed army, some sacred tribe in heaven? They were directors of the forms of worship in the church below, under divine inspiration; and might not that fit them to become leaders of some celestial assembly, when a multitude of the sons of God above come at stated seasons to present themselves before the throne? Both of them knew how to celebrate the praise of their Creator in sacred melody; but David was the chief of mortals in this harmonious work; and may we not imagine that he is or shall be a master of heavenly music, before or after the resurrection, and teach some of the choirs above to tune their harps to the Lamb that was slain?

But to come down to more modern times. Is there not a Boyle* and a Ray† in heaven? Pious

* The honourable Robert Boyle, Esq., a most pious inquirer into nature, and an improver of the experimental philosophy.

† Mr. John Ray, one of the ministers ejected for non-conformity in 1662. He employed most of his studies afterward in the cultivation of natural philosophy, in collections and remarks on the variety of plants, birds, beasts, fishes, &c., and wrote several treatises to improve natural philosophy to the services of religion.

souls who were trained up in sanctified philosophy: and surely they are fitted beyond their fellow-saints, to contemplate the wisdom of God in the works of his hands. Is there not a More* and a Howe,† that have exercised their minds in an uncommon acquaintance with the world of spirits? And doubtless their thoughts are refined and improved in the upper world, and yet still engaged in the same pursuit. There is also a Goodwin‡ and an Owen,§ who have laid out the vigour of their inquiries in the glories and wonders of the person of Christ, his bloody sacrifice, his dying love, and his exalted station at the right hand of God. The first of these, with a penetrating genius, traced out many a new and uncommon thought, and made rich discoveries by digging in the mines of scripture. The latter of them humbly pursued and confirmed divine truth; and both of them were eminent in promoting faith and piety, spiritual peace and joy, upon the principles of grace and the gospel. Their labours in some of these subjects, no doubt, have prepared them for some correspondent peculiarities in the state of glory. For though the doctrines of the person, the priesthood and the grace of Christ, are themes which all the glorified souls converse with and rejoice in; yet spirits that have been trained up in them with peculiar delight for forty or fifty years, and devoted most of their time to these blessed contemplations, have surely gained some advantage by it, some peculiar fitness to receive

* Dr. Henry More, a great searcher into the world of spirits, and a pious divine of the Church of England.

† Mr. John Howe, a name well known and highly honoured for his sagacity of thought, his exalted ideas, and converse with the spiritual world, as appears in his writings.

‡ Dr. Thomas Goodwin, and

§ Dr. John Owen, two famous divines of prime reputation among the churches in the last century.

the heavenly illuminations of these mysteries above their fellow-spirits.

There is also the soul of an ancient Eusebius,* and the later spirits of an Usher† and a Burnet,‡ who have entertained themselves and the world with the sacred histories of the church, and the wonders of Divine Providence in its preservation and recovery. There is a Tillotson,§ that has cultivated the subjects of holiness, peace, and love, by his pen and his practice: there is a Baxter,‖ that he has wrought hard for an end of controversies, and laboured with much zeal for the conversion of souls, though with much more success in the last than in the first.

Now though all the spirits in heaven enjoy the general happiness of the love of God and Christ, and the pleasurable review of providence; yet may we not suppose these spirits have some special circumstances of sacred pleasure, suited to their labours and studies in their state of trial on earth! For the church on earth is but a training school for the church on high, and, as it were, a tiring-room in which we are drest in proper habits for our appearance and our places in that bright assembly.

But some will reprove me here, and say,—What! must none but ministers, and authors, and learned men have their distinguished rewards and glories in the world of spirits? May not artificers, and traders,

* Eusebius, one of the fathers of the Christian church, who wrote the History of the Primitive Ages of Christianity.

† Dr. John Usher, in the last century archbishop of Armagh, whose chronological writings and piety have rendered his name honourable in the world.

‡ Dr. Gilbert Burnet, late bishop of Salisbury, whose serious religion and zeal to promote it among the clergy, made him almost as famous as his History of the English Reformation.

§ The names of Dr. John Tillotson, late archbishop of Canterbury, and of

‖ Mr. Richard Baxter, a divine of great note among the Protestant Dissenters, need no further paraphrase to make them known.

and pious women be fitted by their character and conduct on earth for peculiar stations and employments in heaven?

Yes, doubtless their zeal for the honour of God, their fervent love to Christ, their patience under long trials, and the variety of their graces exercised according to their stations on earth, may render them peculiarly fitted for special rewards on high; the wisdom of God will not be at a loss to find out distinguishing pleasures to recompense them all; though where the very station and business of this life is such as makes a nearer approach to the blessedness and business of heaven, it is much easier for us to guess at the nature of that future recompense.

Let me ask my own soul then, "Soul, what art thou busy about? What is thy chief employment during thy present state of trial? I hope thou art not making 'provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof;' for then thou art fit for no place in heaven, the doors will be for ever shut against thee. But what special works of the Spirit art thou engaged in? Dost thou redeem what hours thou art able, from the necessary businesses of life, to do more immediate service for God, to converse with things heavenly? Art thou seeking to gain a proper meetness for the sublimer employments of that upper world, and a relish of the most refined pleasures?"

But I proceed to the second particular.

II. The perfection of the spirits above, not only admits of a rich variety of entertainments, according to the various relish and inclination of the blessed, but it is such a perfection as allows of different degrees even in the same blessedness, according to the different capacities of spirits, and their different degrees of preparation. The word perfection does not always require equality.

If all the souls in heaven were of one mould, and make, and inclination, yet there may be different

sizes of capacity even in the same genius, and a different degree of preparation for the same delights and enjoyments; therefore though all the spirits of the just were uniform in their natures and pleasures, and all perfect; yet one spirit may possess more happiness and glory than another, because it is more capacious of intellectual blessings, and better prepared for them. So when vessels of various size are thrown into the same ocean, there will be a great difference in the quantity of the liquid which they receive, though all might be full to the brim, and all made of the richest metal.

Now there is much evidence of this truth in the Holy Scripture. Our Saviour intimates such differences of rewards in several of his expressions. Mat. xix. 28: he promises the apostles, that they "shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." And it is probable that this may denote something of superior honour or dignity above the meanest of the saints. And even among the apostles themselves he seems to allow of a difference; for though he would not promise James and John to sit next to him on his right hand and his left in his kingdom, Matt. xx. 20, &c., yet he does not deny that there are such distinct dignities, but says, "It shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of his Father," ver. 23.

Again, our Lord says, Matt. x. 41, 42, He that receives a prophet, and entertains him as a prophet, shall have a prophet's reward; and he that entertains a righteous man agreeably to his character, and from a real esteem of his righteousness, shall have a righteous man's reward; and even the meanest sort of entertainment, a cup of cold water given to a disciple, for the sake of his character, shall not go without some reward. Here are three sorts or degrees of reward mentioned, extending to the life to come, as well as to this life; now though neither

of them can be merited by works, but all are entirely conferred by grace, yet as one observes here, "The Lord hath fixed a proportion between the work and the reward; so that as one has different degrees of goodness, the other shall have different degrees of excellency."

Our Saviour assures us, that the torments of hell shall admit of various degrees and distinctions; some will be more exquisite and terrible than others; it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, who never sinned against half so much light, than it shall be for Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, where Christ himself had preached his gospel, and confirmed it with most evident miracles, Matt. xi. 21—24. And the servants who did not the will of their Lord, shall be beaten with more or fewer stripes, according to their different degrees of knowledge and advantages of instruction; Luke xii. 47, 48. Now may we not, by a parallel reasoning, suppose there will be various orders and degrees of reward in heaven, as well as punishment in hell; since there is scarce a greater variety among the degrees of wickedness among sinners on earth, than there is of holiness among the saints?

When the apostle is describing the glories of the body at the great resurrection, he seems to represent the differences of glory that shall be conferred on different saints, by the difference of the great luminaries of heaven; 1 Cor. xv. 41, 42: "There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another in glory; so also is the resurrection of the dead."

The prophet Daniel led the way to this description, and the same Spirit taught the apostle the same language; Dan. xii. 2, 3: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some

to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt; and they that be wise shall shine," (with common glory) "as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness," (shall have a peculiar lustre) "as the stars for ever and ever." And if there be a difference in the visible glories of the saints at the resurrection, if those who turn many to righteousness shall sparkle, in that day with brighter beams than those who are only wise for their own salvation; the same reason leads us to believe a difference of spiritual glory in the state of separate spirits, when the recompense of their labours is begun.

So, 1 Cor. iii. 8: "He that planteth, and he that watereth, are one; and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." If all be rewarded alike, the apostle would not have said, Each man shall receive according to his own labour. Surely since there is a distinction of labours, there will be a distinction of rewards too.

And it is with this view the same apostle exhorts the Corinthians, 1 Cor. xv. 58: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Now that great labour and diligence, that steadfastness in profession, and that zeal in practice, to which the apostle exhorts them, might seem to be in vain, if those who were far less laborious, less zealous, and less steadfast, should obtain an equal recompense.

It is upon the same principle that he encourages them to holy patience under afflictive trials, 2 Cor. iv. 17, when he says, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, and temporal, but at the things invisible and eternal." Now if the

saint, who was called to heaven almost as soon as he was made a Christian, and went through no sufferings, should possess the same weight of glory with the martyrs and confessors, under the long and tedious train of cruelties which they sustained from men, or painful trials from the hand of God; I cannot see how their afflictions could be said to work for them a far more exceeding weight of glory.

He urges them also to great degrees of liberality from the same motive; 2 Cor. ix. 6: "This I say, he that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully, shall also reap bountifully." Which words may reasonably be construed to signify the blessings of the world to come, as well as the blessings of the present life; for this apostle speaking of the same duty of liberality, expresses the same encouragement under the same metaphors; Gal. vi. 6—9: "Let him that is taught in the word, communicate to him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: for he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." When God distributes the riches of his glory amongst the saints in heaven, he pours them out in a large and bountiful manner upon those who have distributed the good things of this life bountifully to the poor; but he rewards the narrow-souled Christian with a more sparing hand.

With the same design does the apostle encourage Christians to watchfulness against sin and heresy, as well as ministers, to a solicitous care of their doctrine and preaching; 1 Cor. iii. 12—15. If any man build gold, silver, or precious stones upon the true foundation Jesus Christ, and raise a glorious super-

structure of faith and holiness, he shall receive a reward answerable to his skill and care in building; for his work shall stand, when it is tried by the fire of the judgment-day. But if he build wood, hay, and stubble upon it, evil inferences, and corrupt practices, or trifles, fruitless controversies, idle speculations, and vain ceremonies, his works shall be burnt, and he shall suffer loss, shall obtain a far less recompense for his labour; yet, since he has laid Christ for the foundation, and has taught and practised the fundamental doctrines and duties of Christianity, though mingled with much folly and weakness, he himself shall be saved; yet in so hazardous a manner as a man that is saved by fire, who loses all his goods, and just escapes with his life.

When you hear St. Paul or St. John, speaking of the last judgment, they give hints of the same distinction of rewards, 2 Cor. v. 10: "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Eph. vi. 8: "Whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." Rev. xxii. 12: "And behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Though the highest and holiest saint in heaven can claim nothing there by the way of merit (for it is our Lord Jesus Christ alone, who has purchased all those unknown blessings) yet he will distribute them according to the different characters and degrees of holiness which his saints possessed on earth; and those larger degrees of holiness were also the free gift of God our Saviour.

I have often represented it to my own thoughts under this comparison. Here is a race appointed;

here are a thousand different prizes, purchased by some prince to be bestowed on the racers; and the prince himself gives them food and wine, according to what proportion he pleases, to strengthen and animate them for the race. Each has a particular stage appointed for him; some of shorter, and some of longer distance. When every racer comes to his own goal, he receives a prize in most exact proportion to his speed, diligence, and length of race; and the grace and the justice of the prince shine gloriously in such a distribution. Not the foremost of the racers can pretend to have merited the prize; for the prizes were all paid for by the prince himself; and it was he that appointed the race, and gave them spirit and strength to run; and yet there is a most equitable proportion observed in the reward, according to the labours of the race: Now this similitude represents the matter so agreeably to the apostle's way of speaking, when he compares the Christian life to a race, 1 Cor. xi. 24, &c. Gal. v. 7. Phil. iii. 14; 2 Tim. iv. 7; Heb. xii. 1; that I think it may be called almost a scriptural description of the present subject.

The reason of man, and the light of nature, entirely concur with scripture in this point. The glory of heaven is prepared for those who are prepared for it in a state of grace, Rom. ix. 23. It is God who makes each of us meet for our own inheritance among the saints in light, Col. i. 12; and then he bestows on us that inheritance. As grace fits the soul for glory, so a larger degree of grace advances and widens the capacity of the soul, and prepares it to receive a larger degree of glory. The work of grace is but the means, the reward of glory is the end; now the wisdom of God always fits and adjusts the means in a due proportion to answer the end he designs: and the same wisdom ever makes the end answerable to the means he useth; and there-

fore he infuses more and higher glories into vessels more enlarged and better prepared.

Some of the spirits in heaven may be trained up by their stations and sacred services on earth, for more elevated employments and joys on high. Can we imagine that the soul of David, the sweet Psalmist, the prophet, and the king of Israel, is not fitted by all his labours and trials, all his raptures of faith, and love, and zeal, for some sublimer devotion and nobler business than his own infant child, the fruit of his adultery? And yet our divines have generally placed this child in heaven, because David ceased to mourn for him at his death, and said, that he himself should go to him; 2 Sam. xii. 20, 23. Deborah, the prophetess, judged Israel; she animated their armies, and sung their victories. Is not Deborah engaged in some more illustrious employment among the heavenly tribes than good Dorcas may seem to be capable of, whose highest character upon record is, that she was full of alms-deeds, and made coats and garments for the poor? Acts ix. 36, 39. And yet perhaps Dorcas is prepared too for some greater enjoyments, some sweeter relish of mercy, or some special taste of the divine goodness, above Rahab the harlot; Rahab, whose younger character was lewd and infamous, and the best thing that we read of her is, that her faith under the present terror of the armies of Israel taught her once to cover and conceal their spies; and unless she made great advances afterward in grace, surely her place is not very high in glory.

The worship of heaven, and the joy that attends it, may be exceedingly different in degrees according to the different capacity of spirits, and yet all may be perfect and free from sinful defects. Does not the sparrow praise the Lord its Maker upon the ridge of a cottage, chirping in its native perfection? And yet the lark advances in her flight and her song

as far above the sparrow, as the clouds are above the house-top.

Surely superior joys and glories must belong to superior powers and services.

Can we think that Abraham and Moses, who were trained up in converse with God face to face, as a man converses with his friend, and who followed him through the wilderness and unknown countries in a glorious exercise of faith, were not prepared for a greater intimacy with God, and nearer views of his glory in heaven, than Samson and Jephthah, those rude heroes, who being appointed of God for that service, spent their days in bloody work, in hewing down the Philistines and the Amorites? For we read little of their acquaintance with God, or converse with him, beside a petition now and then, or a vow for victory and for slaughter; and we should hardly have charity enough to believe they were saved, if St. Paul had not graced them among the examples of faith in his eleventh chapter to the Hebrews. Can we ever believe that the thief upon the cross, who spent his life in plundering and mischief, and made a single though sincere profession of the name of Jesus just in his dying hour, was prepared for the same high station and enjoyment in paradise, so near the right hand of Christ, as the great apostle Paul, whose prayers and sermons, whose miracles of labour and suffering filled up and finished a long life, and honoured his Lord and Saviour more than all the twelve apostles besides? Can we imagine that the child that is just born into this world under the friendly shadow of the covenant of grace, and weeps and dies, and is taken to heaven, is fit to be possessor of the same glories, or raised to the same degree there, as the studious, the laborious, and the zealous Christian, that has lived above fourscore years on earth, and spent the great-

est part of his life in the studies of religion, the exercises of piety, and the zealous and painful services of God and his country? Surely, if all these which I have named must have equal knowledge and joy in the future world, it is hard to find how such an exact equity shall be displayed in the distribution of final rewards, as the word of God so frequently describes.

Objection. But in the parable of the labourers, hired to work in the vineyard, Matt. xx. 9—12; does not every man receive his penny, they who were called at the first and third hour, and they who were called at the last? Were not their rewards all equal, those who had wrought but one hour, and those who had borne the burden and the heat of the day?

Answer. It is not the design of this parable to represent the final rewards of the saints at the day of judgment, but to show that the nation of the Jews, who had been called to be the people of God above a thousand years before, and had borne the burden and heat of the day, that is, the toil and bondage of many ceremonies, should have no preference in the esteem of God above the Gentiles, who were called at the last hour, or at the end of the Jewish dispensation; for it is said, ver. 16: "The last shall be first, and the first last;" that is, the Gentiles, who waited long ere the gospel was preached to them, shall be the first in receiving it; and the Jews, to whom it was first offered, from an inward scorn and pride shall reject it, or receive it but slowly; and Christ adds this confirmation of it, "for many be called, but few chosen;" that is, though multitudes of Jews were called to believe in Christ, that few accepted the call.

There is another reason why this parable cannot refer to the final rewards of heaven; because, ver. 11, it is said, "Some of them murmured against the

good man of the house." Now there shall be no envy against their fellow-saints, nor murmuring against God in the heavenly state. But the Jews, and even the Jewish converts to Christianity, were ready often to murmur that the gospel should be preached to the Gentile world, and that the heathens should be brought into privileges equal with themselves.

Thus it sufficiently appears, from the frequent declarations of scripture, as well as from the reason and equity of things, that the rewards of the future world shall be greatly distinguished according to the different degrees of holiness and service for God, even though every spirit there shall be perfect; nor is there any just and reasonable objection against it.

Is it certain then, that heaven has various degrees of happiness in it, and shall my spirit rest contented with the meanest place there, and the least and lowest measure? Hast thou no sacred ambition in thee, O my soul, to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Or dost thou not aspire at least to the middle ranks of glorified saints, though perhaps thou mayest despair of those most exalted stations which are prepared for the spirits of chief renown, for Abraham and Moses of ancient time, and for the martyrs and the apostles of the Lamb? Wilt thou not stir up all the vigour of nature and grace within thee, to do great service for thy God and thy Saviour on earth, that thy reward in heaven may not be small? Wilt thou not run with zeal and patience the race that is set before thee, looking to the brightest cloud of witnesses, and reaching at some of the richer prizes? Remember that Jesus thy Judge is coming apace; he has rewards with him of every size, and the lustre and weight of thy crown shall most exactly correspond to thy sweat and labour.

But I must not dwell always on this head; I proceed therefore to the next.

11. The spirits of the just in heaven enjoy such a perfection as is consistent with perpetual changes of business and delights even in the same person or spirit. They may be always perfect, but in a rich and endless variety.

It is only God who possesses all possible excellencies, and powers, and happinesses at once, and therefore he alone is incapable of change; but creatures must possess and enjoy their delights in a succession, because they cannot possess and enjoy all that they are capable of at once. And according to this consideration the heavenly state is represented in scripture in various forms both of business and blessedness.

Sometimes it is described by seeing God, Matt. v. 8, by beholding him face to face, 1 Cor. xiii. 12, by being present with the Lord, 2 Cor. v. 8; by being where Christ is, to behold his glory, John xvii. 24. Sometimes the saints above are said to serve him as his servants, Rev. xxii. 3. Sometimes they are represented as worshipping before the throne, as being fed with the fruits of the tree of life, and drinking the living fountains of water, Rev. vii. 15, 17, and xxii. 1, 2, and let it be noted that twelve manner of fruits grew on this tree, and they were new every month also. Sometimes they are held forth to us as singing a new song to God, and to the Lamb, Rev. xiv. 3. And at another time, they are described as wearing a crown of righteousness and glory, of sitting on the throne of Christ, of reigning for ever and ever, and ruling the nations with a rod of iron, 2 Tim. iv. 8, 1 Pet. v. 4, Rev. xxii. 5; and ii. 26, 27. And in another place our happiness is represented as sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, Matt. viii. 11. Now surely this rich variety of language, whereby the heavenly state is proposed to us in scripture, must intend a variety of entertain-

ments and employments, that may in some measure answer the glory of such expressions.

It is not only the powers of our understanding that shall be regaled and feasted in those happy regions with the blissful vision of God and Christ, but our active powers shall doubtless have their proper entertainments too. When angels are so variously and delightfully employed in service for God, in his several known and unknown worlds, we cannot suppose the spirits of just men shall be eternally confined to a sedentary state of inactive contemplation.

Contemplation indeed is a noble pleasure, and the joy of it arises high when it is fixed on the sublimest objects, and when the faculties are all exalted and refined. But surely such a sight of God and our dear Redeemer as we shall enjoy above, will awaken and animate all the active and sprightly powers of the soul, and set all the springs of love and zeal at work in most illustrious instances of unknown and glorious duty.

I confess heaven is described as a place of rest, that is, rest from sin and sorrow, rest from pain and weariness, rest from all the toilsome labours and conflicts that we endure in a state of trial; but it can never be such a rest as lays all our active powers asleep, or renders them useless in such a vital and active world. It would diminish the happiness of the saints in glory to be unemployed there. Those spirits who have tasted unknown delight and satisfaction in many long seasons of devotion, and in a thousand painful services for their blessed Lord on earth, can hardly bear the thoughts of paying no active duties, doing no work at all for him in heaven, where business is all over delight, and labour is all enjoyment. Surely his servants shall serve him there, as well as worship him. They shall serve him perhaps as priests in his temple, and as kings,

or viceroys in his wide dominions; for they are made kings and priests unto God for ever, Rev. v. 10.

But let us dwell a little upon their active employments, and perhaps a close and attentive meditation may lead us into an unexpected view and notice of their sacred commissions and embassies, their governments, and their holy conferences, as well as their acts of worship and adoration.

That heaven is a place or state of worship, is certain, and beyond all controversy; for this is a very frequent description of it in the word of God. And as the great God has been pleased to appoint different forms of worship to be practised by his saints and his churches under the different economies of his grace; so it is possible he may appoint peculiar forms of sacred magnificence to attend his own worship in the state of glory. Bowing the knee, and prostration of the body, are forms and postures of humility practised by earthly worshippers. Angels cover their faces and their feet with their wings, and cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts!" Isa. vi. 2, 3. But what unknown and illustrious forms shall be consecrated by the appointment and authority of Christ, for the unbodied or the bodied saints in heaven to adorn their sacred offices, is above our reach to describe or to imagine.

Let us consider now what parts of worship the blessed are employed in.

The various parts of divine worship that are practised on earth, at least such as are included in natural religion, shall doubtless be performed in heaven too; and what other unknown worship of positive and celestial appointment shall belong to the heavenly state, is as much above our present conjecture, as the forms of it are.

Heaven is represented as full of praises. There is the most glorious and perfect celebration of God the

Father and the Saviour in the upper world; and the highest praise is offered to them with the deepest humility.

The crowns of glory are cast down at their feet, and all the powers and perfections of God, with all his labours of creation, his cares of providence, and the sweeter mysteries of his grace, shall furnish noble matter for divine praise.

This work of praise is also exhibited in scripture, as attended with a song and heavenly melody. What there is in the world of separate spirits to answer the representations of harps and voices, we know not. It is possible that spirits may be capable of some sort of harmony in their language, without a tongue, and without an ear, and there may be some inimitable and transporting modulations of divine praise without the material instruments of string or wind. The soul itself, by some philosophers, is said to be mere harmony; and surely then it will not wait for it till the body be raised from the dust, nor live so long destitute of all melodious joys, or of that spiritual pleasure which shall supply the place of melody, till our organs of sense shall be restored to us again.

But is all heaven made up of praises? Is there no prayer there? Let us consider a little; what is prayer, but the desire of a created spirit in an humble manner made known to its Creator? Does not every saint above desire to know God, to love and serve him, to be employed for his honour, and to enjoy the eternal continuance of his love and its own felicity? May not each happy spirit in heaven exert these desires in a way of solemn address to the Divine Majesty? May not the happy soul acknowledge its dependence in this manner upon its Father and its God? Is there no place in the heart of a glorified saint for such humble addresses as these? Does not every separate spirit there look

and long for the resurrection, when it is certain that imbodied spirits on earth, who have received the first fruits of grace and glory, "groan within themselves, waiting for the redemption of the body?" Rom. viii. 23. And may we not suppose each holy soul sending a sacred and fervent wish after this glorious day, and lifting up a desire to its God about it, though without the uneasiness of a sigh or a groan? May it not, under the influence of divine love, breathe out the requests of its heart, and the expressions of its zeal for the glory and kingdom of Christ? May not the church above join with the churches below in this language: "Father, thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?" Are not the souls of the martyrs that were slain, represented to us as under the altar, crying with a loud voice, "How long, O Lord, holy and true?" Rev. vi. 9, 10. This looks like the voice of prayer in heaven.

Perhaps you will suppose there is no such service as hearing sermons, that there is no attendance upon the word of God there. But are we sure there are no such entertainments? Are there no lectures of divine wisdom and grace given to the younger spirits there, by spirits of a more exalted station? Or may not our Lord Jesus Christ himself be the everlasting teacher of his church? May he not at solemn seasons summon all heaven to hear him publish some new and surprising discoveries, which have never yet been made known to the ages of nature, or of grace, and are reserved to entertain the attention, and exalt the pleasure of spirits advanced to glory? Must we learn all by the mere contemplation of Christ's person? Does he never make use of speech to the instruction and joy of saints above?

Moses and Elijah came down once from heaven to make a visit to Christ on mount Tabor, and the subject of their converse with him was his death and

departure from this world, Luke ix. 31. Now since our Lord is ascended to heaven, are these holy souls cut off from this divine pleasure? Is Jesus for ever silent? Does he converse with his glorified saints no more? And surely if he speak, the saints will hear and attend.

Or it may be that our blessed Lord (even as he is man) has some noble and unknown way of communicating a long discourse, or a long train of ideas and discoveries to millions of blessed spirits at once, without the formalities of voice and language; and at some peculiar seasons he may thus instruct and delight his saints in heaven.

Thus it appears there may be something among the spirits of the just above, that is analogous to prayer and preaching, as well as praise.

O how gustful are the pleasures of celestial worship! What unknown varieties of performance, what sublime ministrations there are, and glorious services, none can tell. And in all this variety, which may be performed in sweet succession, there is no wandering thought, no cold affection, no divided heart, no listless or indifferent worshipper. What we call rapture and ecstasy here on earth, is perhaps the constant and uninterrupted pleasure of the church on high in all their adorations.

But let the worship of the glorified spirits be never so various, yet I cannot persuade myself that mere direct acts or exercises of what we properly call worship, are their only and everlasting work.

The scripture tells us, there are certain seasons when the angels, those sons of God, come to present themselves before the Lord, Job i. 6, and ii. 1. It is evident, then, that the intervals of these seasons are spent in other employments; and when they present themselves before God, it does not sufficiently appear that mere adoration and praise is their only business

at the throne. In the very place which I have cited, it seems more natural to suppose that these angelic spirits came thither rather to render an account of their several employments, and the success of their messages to other worlds. And why may we not suppose such a blessed variety of employment among the spirits of men too?

This supposition has some countenance in the holy scripture. The angel or messenger who appeared to St. John, and showed him various visions, by the order of Christ, forbids the apostle to worship him, for "I am thy fellow-servant, (said he) and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book;" Rev. xxii. 8, 9. These words naturally lead one to think, that though he appeared as a messenger from Christ, and in the form of an angel, yet he was really a departed saint, a brother, a fellow-prophet, perhaps the soul of David, or Isaiah, or Moses, who would count it an honour even in their state of glory to be thus employed by their exalted Lord; and they also keep or observe and wait for the accomplishment of the sayings of that book of the Revelation, as well as the churches of their brethren, the saints on earth.

I freely allow immediate divine worship to take up a good part of their everlasting day, their sabbath? and therefore I suppose them to be often engaged, millions at once, in social worship; and sometimes acting apart, and raised in sublime meditation of God, or in a fixed vision of his blissful face, with an act of secret adoration, while their intellectual powers are almost lost in sweet amazement; sometimes they are entertaining themselves and their fellow-spirits with the graces and glories of the man Christ Jesus, the Lamb that was slain in the midst of the throne; but at other times they may be making a report to him of their faithful execution of some divine commission they received from him, to

be fulfilled either in heaven or in earth, or in unknown and distant worlds.

There may be other seasons also, when they are not immediately addressing the throne, but are most delightfully engaged in recounting to each other the wondrous steps of providence, wisdom, and mercy, that seized them from the very borders of hell and despair, and brought them through a thousand dangers and difficulties to the possession of that fair inheritance. When the great God shall unravel the scheme of his own counsels, shall unfold every part of his mysterious conduct, and set before them the reason of every temptation they grappled with, and of every sorrow they felt here on earth, and with what divine and successful influence they all wrought together to train them up for heaven, what matter of surprising delight and charming conversation shall this furnish the saints with in that blessed world? And now and then in the midst of their sacred dialogues, by a sympathy of soul they shall shout together in sweet harmony, and join their exalted songs to him that sits upon the throne and to the Lamb. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy power, to thy wisdom, and to thine abounding mercy, be renown and honour to everlasting ages."

Nor is it improper or unpleasant to suppose that among the rest of their celestial conferences, they shall show each other the fair and easy solution of those difficulties and deep problems in divinity, which had exercised and perplexed them here on earth, and divided them into little angry parties. They shall look back with holy shame on some of their learned and senseless distinctions, and be ready to wonder sometimes what trifles and impertinences had engaged them in dark and furious disputes. Darkness and entanglement shall vanish at once from many of those knotty points of controversy,

when they behold them in the light of heaven: and the rest of them shall be matter of delightful instruction for superior spirits to bestow on those of lower rank, or on souls lately arrived at the regions of light.

In short, there is nothing written in the books of nature, the records of providence, or the sacred volumes of grace, but may minister materials at special seasons for the holy conference of the saints on high. No history nor prophecy, no doctrine nor duty, no command, nor promise, nor threatening in the Bible, but may recall the thoughts of the heavenly inhabitants, and engage them in sweet conversation. All things that relate to the affairs of past ages and past worlds, as well as the present regions of light and happiness where they dwell, may give them new themes of dialogue and mutual intercourse.

And though we are very little acquainted, whilst we are on earth, with any of the planetary worlds, besides that which we inhabit, yet who knows how our acquaintance may be extended hereafter amongst the various and distant globes? And what frequent and swift journeys we may take thither, when we are disincumbered of the load of flesh and blood, or when our bodies are raised again, active and swift as sun-beams! Sometimes we may entertain our holy curiosity there, and find millions of new discoveries of divine power and divine contrivance in those unknown regions; and bring back from thence new lectures of divine wisdom, or tidings of the affairs of those provinces, to entertain our fellow-spirits, and to gain new honours to God the Creator and the Sovereign. So a pious traveller in our lower world visits Africa or both the Indies; at his return he sits in a circle of attentive admirers, and recounts to them the wondrous products of those climates, and the customs and manners of those distant countries; he gratifies their curiosity with some foreign

varieties, and feasts their eyes aud their ears at once; then at the end of every story he breaks out into holy language, and adores the various riches and wisdom of God the Creator.

To proceed yet one step farther. Since there are different degrees of glory, we may infer a variety of honours as well as delights prepared for the spirits of the just made perfect.

Some part of the happiness of heaven is described in scripture by crowns and thrones, by royalty and kingly honours; why may we not then suppose, that such souls, whose sublimer graces have prepared them for such dignity and office, may rule the nations, even in a literal sense? Why may not those spirits that have past their trials in flesh and blood, and come off conquerors, why may they not sometimes be appointed visiters and superintendents over whole provinces of intelligent beings in lower regions, who are yet labouring in a state of probation? or perhaps they may be exalted to a presidency over inferior ranks of happy spirits, may shine bright amongst them as a morning star, and lead on their holy armies to celestial work or worship. The scripture itself gives us a hint of such employments in the angelic world, and such presidencies over some parts of our world, or of their own. Do we not read of Gabriel and Michael, and their management of the affairs of Persia, and Greece, and Judah, in the book of Daniel? And it is an intimation of the same hierarchy, when some superior angel led on a multitude of the heavenly host to sing a hymn of praise at Bethlehem, when the Son of God was born there; Luke ii. 9, 13. Now if angels are thus dignified, may not human spirits unbodied have the same office? Our Saviour, when he rewards the faithful servant that had gained ten pounds, bids him take authority over ten cities; and he that had gained five, had five cities under his

government; Luke xix. 17, &c.: so that this is not a mere random thought, or a wild invention of fancy, but patronized by the word of God.

Among the pleasures and engagements of the upper world, there shall be always something new and entertaining; for the works and the dominions of God are vast beyond all our comprehension. And what a perpetual change, what a glorious but improving rotation of businesses and joys shall succeed one another through the ages of eternity, we shall never know till we come amongst them. This thought leads me to the last particular, namely,

IV. The perfection which the blessed spirits enjoy, gives room for large additions and continual improvement.

Their knowledge and their joy may be called perfect, because there is no mixture of error or sorrow with it; and because it is sufficient every moment for the satisfaction of present desires, without an uneasiness of mind. But it may be doubted whether any creature ever was, or ever will be so perfect, that it is not capable of addition or growth in any excellency or enjoyment.

The man Christ Jesus, in his present glorified state, has not such a perfection as this. He waits daily to see his Father's promises fulfilled to him; he waits till all things are put under him, and his enemies are made his actual footstool; but we know that all things are not yet put under him, Heb. ii. 8; that is, all the nations are not yet subject to his spiritual kingdom, nor become obedient to his gospel, As fast as his kingdom grows on earth, so fast his honours and his joys arise; and he waits still for the complete union of all his members to himself the sacred head; he waits for the morning of the resurrection, when he shall be glorified in the bright and general assembly of his saints, and admired in all them that believe, 2 Thess. i. 10.

O that illustrious and magnificent appearance! That shining hour of jubilee, when the bodies of millions of saints shall awake out of the dust, and be released from their long dark prison! When they shall encompass and adore Jesus their Saviour and their God, and acknowledge their new life and immortal state to be owing to his painful and shameful death; when Noah, Abraham, and David, and all his pious progenitors shall bow and worship Jesus their Son and their Lord; when the holy army of martyrs, springing from the dust with palms of victory in their hands, shall ascribe their conquest and their triumph to the Lamb that was slain; when he shall present his whole church before the presence of his own and his Father's glory, without spot, and faultless, with exceeding joy! Can we imagine that Christ himself, even the man Jesus, in the midst of all this magnificence and these honours, shall feel no new satisfaction, and have no relish of all this joy, above what he possessed while his church lay bleeding on earth, and this illustrious company were buried under ground in the chains of death? And yet you will say Christ in heaven is made perfect in knowledge and in joy, but his perfection admits of improvement.

Now if the Head be not above the capacity of all growth and addition, surely the members cannot pretend to it. But I shall propose several more arguments for this truth in the following section.

SECTION IV.

OF THE INCREASE OF THE SAINTS ABOVE IN KNOWLEDGE, HOLINESS, AND JOY.

That there is, and has been, and will be continual progress and improvement in the knowledge and joy of separate souls, may be easily proved many

ways, namely, from the very nature of human reason itself; from the narrowness, the weakness, and limitation even of our intellectual faculties in their best estate; from the immense variety of objects that we shall converse about; from our peculiar concern in some future providences, which it is not likely we should know before they occur; and from the glorious new scenes of the resurrection.

1. We may prove the increase of knowledge among the blessed above, from the very nature of human reason itself, which is a faculty of drawing inferences, or some new propositions and conclusions, from propositions or principles which we knew before. Now surely we shall not be dispossessed of this power when we come to heaven. What we learn of God there, and the glories of his nature, or his works, will assist and incline us to draw inferences for his honour, and for our worship of him. And if we could be supposed to have never so many propositions or new principles of knowledge crowded into our minds at the first entrance into heaven, yet surely our reasoning faculty would still be capable of making some advance by way of inference, or building some superstructure upon so noble a foundation. And who knows the intense pleasure that will arise perpetually to a contemplative mind, by a progressive and infinite pursuit of truth in this manner, where we are secure against the danger of all error and mistake, and every step we take is all light and demonstration.

Shall it be objected here, that our reason shall be as it were lost and dissolved in intuition and immediate sight, and therefore it shall have no room or place in that happy world?

To this I would reply, That we shall have indeed much more acquaintance with spiritual objects by immediate intuition, than we ever had here on earth; but it does not follow thence that we shall

lose our reason. Angels have immediate vision of God and divine things; but can we suppose they are utterly incapable of drawing an inference, either for the improvement of their knowledge, or the direction of their practice? When they behold any special and more curious piece of divine workmanship, can they not farther infer the exquisite skill or wisdom of the Creator? And are they not capable of concluding, that this peculiar instance of divine wisdom demands an adoring thought? Thus intuition or immediate sight in a creature, does not utterly exclude and forbid the use of reason.

I reply again, Can it ever be imagined, that being released from the body, we shall possess in one moment, and retain through every moment of eternity, all the innumerable ranks, and orders, and numbers of propositions, truths, and duties, that may be derived in a long succession of ages by the use of our reasoning powers? But this leads me to the second argument, namely.

2. The weakness and narrowness of human understandings in their best estate, seems to make it necessary that knowledge should be progressive.

Continual improvement in knowledge and delight among the spirits of the just made perfect, is necessary for the same reason that proved their variety of their entertainments and pleasures, namely, Because creatures cannot take in all the vast, the infinite variety of conceptions in the full brightness and perfection of them at once, of which they are capable in a sweet succession. Can we ever persuade ourselves, that all the endless train of thoughts, and ideas, and scenes of joy, that shall ever pass through the mind of a saint through the long ages of eternity, should be crowded into every single mind the first moment of its entrance into those happy regions? And is a human mind capacious enough

to receive, and strong enough to retain such an infinite multitude of ideas for ever? Or is this the manner of God's working among his intellectual creatures? Surely God knows our frame, and pours in light and glory as we are able to bear it. Such a bright confusion of notions, images, and transports, would probably overwhelm the most exalted spirit, and drown all the noble faculties of the mind at once. As if a man who was born blind should be healed in an instant, and should open his eyes first against the full blaze of the noon-day sun; this would so tumultuate the spirits, and confound the organs of sight, as to reduce the man back again to his first blindness, and perhaps might render him incurable for ever.

3. This argument will be much strengthened, if we do but take a short view of the vast and incomprehensible variety of objects that may be proposed to our minds in the future state, and may feast our contemplation, and improve our joy.

The blessed God himself is an infinite Being; his perfections and glories are unbounded; his wisdom, his holiness, his goodness, his faithfulness, his power and justice, his all-sufficiency, his self-origination, and his unfathomable eternity, have such a number of rich ideas belonging to each of them, that no creature shall ever fully understand. Yet it is but reasonable to believe, that he will communicate so much of himself to us by degrees, as he sees necessary for our business and blessedness in that upper world. Can it be supposed that we should know every thing that belongs to God all at once, which he may discover to us gradually as our capacities improve? Can we think that an infant-soul that had no time for improvement here, when it enters into heaven shall know every thing concerning God, that it can ever attain to through all the ages of

its immortality? When a blessed spirit has dwelt in heaven a thousand years, and conversed with God and Christ, angels and fellow-spirits during all that season, shall it know nothing more of the nature and wondrous properties of God than it knew the first moment of its arrival there?*

But I add farther, the works of God shall doubtless be the matter of our search and delightful survey as well as the nature and properties of God himself. His works are honourable and glorious, and sought out of all that have pleasure in them, Psalm cxi. 2, 3. In his works we shall read his name, his properties, and his glories, whether we fix our thoughts on creation or providence.

The works of God and his wonders of creation in the known and unknown worlds, both as to the number, the variety, and vastness of them, are almost infinite; that is, they transcend all the limits of our ideas, and all our present capacities to conceive. Now there is none of these works of wonder, but may administer some entertainment to the mind of man, and may richly furnish him with new matter for the praise of God in the long succession of eternity.

There is scarcely an animal of the more complete kind, but would entertain an angel with rich curiosities, and feed his contemplation for an age. What a rich and artful structure of flesh upon the solid and well-compacted foundation of bones! What curious joints and hinges, on which the limbs are moved to and fro! What an inconceivable variety of nerves, veins, arteries, fibres, and little invisible parts, are found in every member! What various fluids, blood and juices, run through and agitate the innumerable

* God himself hath infinite goodness in him, which the creature cannot take in at once; they are taking of it in eternally. The saints see in God still things fresh, which they saw not in the beginning of their blessedness.—*Dr. T. Goodwin.*

slender tubes, the hollow strings and strainers of the body! What millions of folding doors are fixed within, to stop those red or transparent rivulets in their course, either to prevent their return backwards or else as a means to swell the muscles and move the limbs! What endless contrivances to secure life, to nourish nature, and to propagate the same to future animals! What amazing lengths of holy meditation would an angel run upon these subjects! And what sublime strains of praise would a heavenly philosopher raise hourly to the almighty and all-wise Creator! And all this from the mere brutal world!

But if we survey the nature of man, he is a creature made up of mind and animal united, and would furnish still more numerous and exalted materials for contemplation and praise; for he has all the richest wonders of animal nature in him, besides the unknown mysteries of mind or spirit. Surely it will create a sacred pleasure in happy souls above, to learn the wonders of divine skill exerted and shining in their own formation, and in the curious workmanship of those bodily engines in which they once dwelt and acted.

Then let them descend to herbs and plants. How numerous are all the products of earth upon her green surface, and all within her dark bowels! All the vegetable and the mineral kingdoms! How many centuries would all these entertain a heavenly inquirer!

The worlds of air, and the worlds of water, the planetary and the starry worlds, are still new objects rich with curiosities; these are all monuments of divine wisdom, and fit subjects for the contemplation of the blessed. Nor can we be supposed to have for ever done with them all when we leave this body, and that for two reasons: one is, because God has never yet received the honour due to his wisdom and power, displayed in the material crea-

tion, from the hands or tongues of men. And the other is, because the spirits of the just shall be joined to bodies again, and then they shall certainly have necessary converse with God's material works and worlds; though perhaps they have more acquaintance with them now in their separate state, than we are apprized of.

And besides all these material works of God, what an unknown variety of other wonders belong to the world of pure spirits, which lie hid from us, and are utterly concealed behind the veil of flesh and blood! What are their natures, and the reach of their powers. Into what ranks and orders they are distributed. What are their governments, their several employments, the different customs and manners of life in the various and most extensive regions of that intellectual world. What are their messages to our earth, or the other habitable globes, and what capacities they are endowed with to move or influence animate or inanimate bodies. All these, and a thousand more of the like nature, are made known, doubtless, to the inhabitants of heaven. These are things that belong to the provinces of light and immortality, but many of them are mysteries to us who dwell in these tabernacles; they lie far beyond our ken, and are wrapt up in sacred darkness, that we can hardly do so much as shoot a guess at them.

Now can we suppose that the meanest spirit in heaven has a full and entire survey of all these innumerable works of God, from the first moment of its entrance thither, throughout all the ages of immortality, without the change of one idea, or the possibility of any improvement? This would be to give a sort of omniscience to every happy spirit, which is more than is generally allowed to the man Christ Jesus. And if there be such a thing as

degrees of glory among the saints above, we may be well assured that the lowest rank of blessed spirits is not advanced to this amazing degree.

Is there no new thing, neither under nor above the sun, that God can entertain any of his children with in the upper world, throughout the infinite extent of all future ages? Are they all made at once so much like God, as to know all things? Or if each of them have their stinted size of knowledge, and their limited number of ideas at their first release from the body, then they are everlastingly cut off from all the surprises of pleasure that arise from new thoughts and new scenes, and new discoveries. Does every saint in heaven read God's great volume of nature through and through the first hour it arrives there? Or is each spirit confined to a certain number of leaves, and bound eternally to learn nothing new, but to review perpetually his own limited lesson? Dares he not, or can he not turn over another leaf, and read his Creator's name in it, and adore his wisdom in new wonders of contrivance? These things are improbable to such a high degree, that I dare almost pronounce them untrue.

The book of providence is another volume in which God writes his name too. Has every single saint such a vast and infinite length of foreknowledge given him at his first admission into glory, that he knows beforehand all the future scenes of providence, and the wonders which God shall work in the upper and lower worlds? I thought the "Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root and the Offspring of David," had been "the only person in heaven or earth that was worthy to take the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof;" Rev. v. 5. Surely the meanest of the saints does not foreknow all those great and important counsels of God, with which our Lord Jesus Christ is intrusted. And yet we may venture

to say, that the spirits of the just in heaven shall know those great and important events that relate to the church on earth, as they arise in successive seasons, that they may give to God and to his Son Jesus Christ revenues of due honour upon this account, as I shall prove immediately.

And indeed if the limits of their knowledge in heaven were so fixed at their first entrance there, that they could never be acquainted with any of these successive providences of God afterwards, we here on earth have a great advantage above them, who see daily the accomplishment of his divine counsels, and adore the wonders of his wisdom and his love; and from this daily increase of knowledge we take our share in the growing joys and blessings of Zion.

But this thought leads me to the fourth argument for the increase of knowledge in heaven.

4. There have been, and there are many future providences on earth, and transactions in heaven, in which the spirits of the just have a very great and dear concernment, aud therefore they must know them when they come to pass; and yet it is by no means probable, that they are known in all their glorious circumstances beforehand by every spirit in heaven.

Let us descend a little to some particular instances, and see whether we cannot make it appear from scripture, with most convincing evidence, that the saints in heaven obtain some additions to their knowledge, by the various new transactions in heaven and in earth.

When our blessed Lord had fulfilled his state of sorrows and sufferings on earth, and ascended into heaven in his glorified human nature, with all the scars of honour, and the ensigns of victory about him; when the Lamb appeared in the midst of the throne with the marks of slaughter and death

upon him, and presented himself before God in the midst of angels and ancient patriarchs, with the accomplishment of all the types and promises about him written in letters of blood; did not those blessed angels, did not the spirits of those patriarchs, learn something more of the mysteries of our redemption, and the wondrous glories of the Redeemer, than what they were acquainted with before? And did not this new glorious scene spread new ideas, new joys and wonders through all the heavenly world? Can the principalities and powers in heavenly places gain by the church on earth any farther discoveries of the manifold wisdom of God? Eph. iii. 10. And can we believe that when Christ, the head of the church, entered into heaven in so illustrious a manner, that these powers, principalities, and blessed spirits, got no brighter discoveries of divine wisdom? To what purpose do they look and pry into these things, 1 Pet. i. 12, if after all their searches they make no advances in knowledge? And must angels be the only proficients in these sublime sciences, while human spirits make no improvement? Can it be supposed that those ancient fathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, to whom the promises were made, that all the nations should be blessed in their seed, had no transporting pleasures, when they first beheld that promised seed crowned with all his glory? When they saw their Son Jesus ascending on high, and leading captivity captive, and the chariots of God that attended him were twenty thousand, even an innumerable company of angels; Psal. lxviii. 17, 18.

If upon this occasion we may talk in the language of mortals, may we not suppose those ancient Fathers raising themselves on high, and overlooking the walls of paradise, to gaze downward upon this ascending triumph? May we not imagine them speaking thus to each other in the holy transport? "And is this our great descendant? Is this our long expected off-

spring? How divine his aspect! How God-like his air! How glorious and adorable all the graces of his countenance! Is this (saith holy David) my Son and my Lord? the king of glory, for whose admission I called the gates of heaven to be lifted up, and opened the everlasting doors for him in an ancient song? Is this the man whose hands and whose feet they pierced on earth, as I once foretold by the spirit of prophecy? I see those blessed scars of honour how they adorn his glorified limbs! I acknowledge and adore my God and my Saviour. I begun his triumph once on my harp in a lower strain, and I behold him now ascending on high; awake my glory; he comes, he comes with the sound of a trumpet, and with the pomp of shouting angels; sing praises, all ye saints, unto our God, sing praises, sing praises unto our king, sing praises. Is this, saith Isaiah, the child born, of whom I spoke? Is this the Son given, of whom I prophesied? I adore him as the mighty God, the Father of ages, and the Prince of peace. I see the righteous branch, adds the prophet Jeremy, the righteous branch from the stem of David, from the root of Jesse. This is the King whom I foretold should reign in righteousness; the Lord my righteousness is his name, I rejoice at his appearance, the throne of heaven is made ready for him. This (saith Daniel) is the Messiah the Prince, who was cut off, but not for himself: the seventy weeks are all fulfilled, and the work is done. He hath finished transgression, and made an end of sin, and hath brought in everlasting righteousness for all his people. But was this the person (saith Zachary the prophet) whom they sold for thirty pieces of silver? Vile indignity and impious madness! Behold he now appears like the man who is fellow, or companion to the Lord of hosts. It is he (saith Malachi) it is he, the messenger of the covenant, who came suddenly to his own temple.

There I held him in my withered arms, (saith aged Simeon) and rapture and prophecy came upon me at once, and I expired in joy and praises."

And we hope our mother Eve stood up among the rest of them, and beheld and confessed the promised Seed of the woman. "O blessed Saviour, that didst break the head of the serpent, though thy heel was bruised, and hast abolished the mischief that my folly and his temptation had brought into thy new-created world!"

Now could we ever suppose all this to be done in the upper regions, with no new smiles upon the countenances of the saints, no special increase of joy among the spirits of the just made perfect? God himself stands in no need of the magnificence of these transactions; Christ Jesus receives the new honours, and all the old inhabitants of heaven taste new and unknown satisfaction in the honours they pay to their exalted Saviour.

Some of the ancients were of opinion, that the souls of the fathers before the ascension of Christ were not admitted into the holy of holies, or the blissful vision of God; but that it was our Lord Jesus, our great High Priest at his ascent to the throne, led the way thither; he rent the veil of the lower heaven, and carried with him the armies of patriarchal souls into some upper, and brighter, and more joyful regions, whereas before they were only admitted into a state of peace and rest. Whether this be so or not, the scripture does not sufficiently declare; but in whatsoever region of heaven they were placed, we may be well assured, from the very nature of things, that such transactions as the triumphant ascent of Christ, could never pass through any of the upper worlds, without enlarging the knowledge and the joy of the blessed inhabitants.

When our Lord Jesus Christ sat down at the right hand of God, he prevailed to open the book

of divine counsels and decrees, Rev. v. 5, and to acquaint himself with all the contents; and this was necessary, that he might manage and govern the affairs of the church and the world in the several successive ages, according to the counsels of the Father. He therefore, and he alone among creatures, knows the end from the beginning, as I hinted before. But as the seals of this book are opened by degrees, and the counsels of God are executed in the lower world, doubtless the angels that are ministers of the providence of Christ, carry tidings to heaven of all the greater changes that relate to the church; and Jesus the Son of God, the King of saints and of nations, receives the shouts and honours of the heavenly world, as fast as the joyful tidings arrive thither.

Nor is this spoken by mere conjecture, for the scripture informs us of the certainty of it. We have frequently accounts in the book of Revelation of new special honours, that were paid to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb at certain special periods of time.

When he first took upon him the execution of his Father's decrees, "The living creatures and elders fell down before the Lamb, and they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; and ten thousand times ten thousand angels echoed (to the song) with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain," &c. Rev. v. 8, 9, 11. So when the servants of God were sealed in their foreheads, the innumerable multitude of saints shouted, "Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb," Rev. vii. 3, 9, 10. So, "When the seventh angel sounded, there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever; and the four and twenty

elders fell upon their faces, and worshipped and gave thanks;" Rev. xi. 15, 16. Again, when the old dragon and his angels were cast out of heaven, there was a loud voice, saying, "Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down;" Rev. xii. 9, 10. So upon the fall of Babylon, chap. xiv., and the victory of the saints, chap. xv., and the final destruction of Antichrist, chap. xix., there are new honours done by the saints to God the Father and his Son Jesus. There are new songs addressed to them at these surprising revolutions on earth, these wondrous turns of judgment on the world and mercy to the church; all which supposes that the heavenly inhabitants are acquainted with them, and thus their knowledge and their joys increase.

Objection. But does not the prophet Isaiah say in the name of the church of Israel, Abraham is ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledges us not? Isa. lxiii. 16.

Answer 1. The words knowledge and acknowledgment often signify a friendly and beneficial care manifested in special acts of kindness and benefits conferred. Therefore the tribe of Levi is said neither to have seen his father nor his mother, nor to acknowledge his brethren, nor to know his own children; Deut. xxxiii. 9, because the sons of Levi slew every man his brother, and every man his neighbour, to execute the vengeance of the Lord upon them; Exod. xxxii. 26—29. So Abraham and Israel in heaven, in the same sense, know not their posterity on earth, when they approve of the anger of God let out upon them, and afford them no defence. This interpretation perfectly agrees with the context. But it does not follow that Abraham and Israel were utterly unacquainted with all the

greater events of providence towards the Jewish nation, though perhaps they might not know the lesser and more minute circumstances of their afflictions or their deliverances.

ANSWER 2. If we could suppose that the souls of the ancient patriarchs were ignorant of the affairs of their posterity before the coming of the Messiah, yet since Christ in our nature now dwells in the midst of them, and has taken the book of divine counsels into his own hands, since the great God-man rules all things in the upper and the lower worlds, it is not probable that Abraham and Israel are so ignorant of the affairs of the church, as they were in the days of Isaiah.

And not only the greater and more extensive dispensations that attend the church on earth, are made known to the spirits of the just made perfect; but even some lesser and particular concerns are very probably revealed to them also.

Is it not said, that when one sinner on earth repents, there is joy among the angels in heaven? Luke xv. 7, 10. For every such convert is a new trophy of divine grace. And when the spirits of the just in heaven shall in successive seasons behold one and another of their old relatives and acquaintance on earth entering in at the gates, and received into heaven, can we imagine there is no new joy amongst them? Do the pleasures of angels increase when they see a man brought into the state of grace, and shall not the souls of men testify their exultation and delight, when they see one of their fellow-souls, perhaps a dear and inward friend, translated to the state of glory? Surely every increase of that happy world shall diffuse increasing joy through the holy ones that dwell in it? and those shall have the sweetest taste of this joy that had the dearest concern in it. O the transporting

and celestial gratulations that pass between two souls of intimate endearment at their first meeting there!

The last argument that I shall use, and it is also the last instance I shall mention, wherein the knowledge and the pleasure of glorified saints must receive addition and improvement, is, the great resurrection-day.

The spirits of men are formed on purpose for union with bodies, and if they could attain complete happiness in the highest degree without them, what need would there be of new creating their bodies from the dust? Upon this supposition the resurrection itself must seem to be almost in vain. But it is evident from the word of God, that the spirits of the just, with all the perfections that belong to a separate state, wait yet for greater perfection when their bodies shall be restored to them; for as they suffered pain and agony in the body, they shall have a recompense of pleasure in the body too. All the days of their appointed time they wait, till this blessed change shall come; Job xiv. 14. God shall call, and the dust of the saints shall answer; God the Creator will have a desire again to the work of his own hands, ver. 15, and the happy souls will have a desire to be rejoined to their old companions.

O glorious hour! O blessed meeting-time! A magnificent and divine spectacle, worthy to attract the eyes of all the creation! When the long-divided parts of human nature shall be united with unknown powers and glories! When these bodies shall be called out of their long dark dungeon, all fashioned anew, and all new dressed in immortality and sunbeams! When these spirits shall assume and animate their limbs again, exulting in new life and everlasting vigour!

Now can we suppose it possible that all this vast and amazing change shall be made by the conflagra-

tion of the earth and the lower heavens, by the awful and illustrious splendours and solemnities of the last judgment, by the bodies of millions of saints and sinners rising into a painful or joyful immortality, and yet no new ideas hereby communicated to the happy spirits; no increase of their knowledge, or improvement of their joys?

Shall the apostles and the prophets, the confessors and the martyrs, stand at the right hand of Christ, and be owned and acknowledged by him with divine applause in the sight of the whole creation, and yet have no new transports of pleasure running through their souls? Shall they be absolved and approved by the voice of God, with thousands of applauding angels, in the face of heaven, earth, and hell, and all this without any advancement of their knowledge, or their blessedness? Shall St. Paul meet the Thessalonian converts in the presence of his Lord Jesus, those souls who were once his labour and his hope, and shall they not at that day appear to be his glory and his joy? Does not he himself tell them so in his first epistle, chap. ii. ver. 19, 20? And can we believe that he or they shall be disappointed? Shall that great apostle see the immense fruits of his labours, the large harvest of souls which he gathered from many provinces of Europe and Asia, all appearing at once in their robes of light and victory, and shall he feel no new inward exultations of spirit at such a sight? And doubtless many thousand souls, whom he never knew on earth, shall be made known to him at that day, and own their conversion to his sacred writings. And shall all this make no addition to his pleasures? The very mention of so absurd a doctrine refutes and condemns itself.

The saints at that day shall, as it were, be brought into a new world, and he that sits upon the throne shall make all things new; and as he crowns his

happy followers with new and unknown blessings, so shall he receive the homage of new and unknown praises. This is a new heaven and a new earth indeed, beyond all our present apprehensions; and the magnificent language of prophecy shall be fulfilled in its utmost force and brightness.

Doubtless there are pleasures to be enjoyed by complete human nature, by imbodied souls, of which a mere separate spirit is not capable. Is it not part of the blessedness of human spirits to enjoy mutual society, and hold a pleasing correspondence with each other? But whatsoever be the means and methods of that correspondence in a separate state, surely it wants something of that complete pleasure and sensible intimacy, which they shall be made partakers of when they shall hold noble communion in their bodies raised from the dust, and refined from every weakness. Is it not the happiness of the saints in heaven to see their glorified Saviour? But even this sight is and must be incomplete, till they are endued with bodily organs again. What converse soever the spirits of the just have with the glorified man Jesus, while they are absent from the body, yet I am persuaded it is not, nor can it be so full and perfect in all respects as it shall be at the general resurrection. They cannot now see him face to face in the literal sense, and they wait for this exalted pleasure, this immediate and beatific sight. Job himself yet waits, though the worms have destroyed his body, till that glorious hour, when in his flesh he shall see God, Job xix. 26, even God, his Redeemer, who shall stand at the last day on the earth; ver. 25.

Not only all the saints on earth, who have received the first fruits of the Spirit, wait for the adoption, that is, the redemption of the body; Rom. viii. 23; but the saints in heaven also live there, waiting till the body be redeemed from the grave, and their adoption shall appear with illustrious evidence: then they

shall all look like the sons of God, like Jesus, the first-beloved and the first-born. The spirits above, how perfect soever they are in the joys of the separate state, yet wait for those endless scenes of unknown delight that shall succeed the resurrection.

And there is abundant reason for it, to be drawn from the word of God; for the scripture speaks but very little concerning the blessedness of separate souls in comparison of the frequent and large accounts of the glory and triumph that shall attend the sound of the last trumpet, and the great rising-day. It is to this blessed hour that the apostles in their writings are always directing the hope of the saints. They are ever pointing to this glorious morning, as the season when they shall receive their reward and their prize, their promised joy and their crown; as though all that they had received before in their state of separation, were hardly to be named in comparison of that more exceeding and eternal weight of additional glory.

What new kinds of sensations shall entertain us in that day, what a rich variety of senses we shall enjoy, with what well-appointed and immortal organs shall we be furnished, instead of our present feeble eyes and ears; and what glorious and transporting objects shall surround us in those unknown worlds, and fill the enlarged powers of the soul with sensible as well as intellectual delights! These are wonders too sublime even for our present conjecture, and are all reserved in the counsels of God to complete the final felicity of the saints.

Thus we have made it appear, that the knowledge and joy that belong to the spirits of the just made perfect may admit of large increase.*

* There is a little treatise, called, The future State, displaying the Progressive knowledge of the Blessed in Heaven, written by a country gentleman, published 1683, wherein are many ingenious thoughts on this subject.

But can their holiness be increased too? Can perfect holiness receive any improvement?

I will not assert any thing in this matter, lest the manner of expression should offend weaker minds; but I desire leave to inquire, Whether those who know most of God do not love him best? Whether those who have the brightest and fullest visions of him, are not most transformed into his image, and made most nearly like to him? Now if the separate spirits in heaven are advanced to different degrees of divine knowledge, may they not in this sense have different degrees of holiness too? Is it not possible that one saint should love God more intensely than another, and be more impressed with his likeness, as he beholds more of his beauty? Is it not possible that a soul shall grow in the strength and fervour of its love and zeal for God, and be more exactly assimilated to him, as it gets nearer to God, and grows up into higher measures of acquaintance with him? Has not the angel Gabriel, the apostle Paul, and the glorified human nature of Christ in any respect more of holiness, or love, or likeness to God, than the meanest saint or angel in heaven? Is not their sublimer knowledge and nearness to God attended with proportionable rays of divine sanctity and glory? Is not the divine image in these exalted saints more complete than in the very lowest?

And yet we may boldly assert, that the meanest saint or angel there is so perfect in holiness, as to be free from all sin; there is nothing to be found in any spirit there, contrary to the nature or the will of God. So a soul released from the body may perhaps grow in likeness and love to God perpetually, and yet it may have no sinful defects either in its love or conformity to God from the first moment of its entrance into heaven.

I shall first illustrate this by two similitudes, and

then propose a rational and clear account of it in a way of argument.

When the distant morning sun shines on a piece of polished metal, the metal reflects the face of the sun in perfection, when the sun first rises on it. But the same instruments coming directly under the meridian sunbeams, shall reflect the same image brighter and warmer; and yet every moment of this reflection from the morning to the highest noon, shall be perfect; that is, without spot, without blemish, and without defect. Such, perhaps, is the holiness of all the saints in heaven.

Or shall I rather borrow a similitude from scripture, and say, the holiness of the spirits in heaven is compared to fine linen? Rev. xix. 8: "The fine linen clean and white is the righteousness of the saints," *ta dikaiomata ton agion.* Now though a garment may be perfectly clean without the least spot or stain, yet fine linen may grow whiter hourly, as it is bleached by the constant influence of the heavens. So though every spirit be perfectly cleansed and purified from all sin and defilement, yet it is not impossible that the degrees of its grace and holiness; or conformity to God, may grow brighter, and much improve by nearer approaches to God, longer acquaintance with him, and the continued influences of his majesty and love.

Now let me propose a rational account of this matter to the consideration of those whose minds are raised above common prejudices.

The holiness of an innocent creature consists in attaining the knowledge of the nature and will of God, according to the utmost of its own present capacity, and the means of discovery which it enjoys, and in the various exercises of love to God in an exact proportion to its knowledge; or to express it briefly thus: An innocent creature is perfectly holy, when it knows and loves God to the utmost reach

of its present powers. If this be done, there is no sinful defect, no guilty imperfection; and yet there may be almost an infinite difference in the various degrees of power and capacity, of knowledge and love, amongst innocent spirits: one spirit may be formed capable of knowing much more of his Maker than another, and may be favoured with richer discoveries. Now if every new divine discovery raise an equal proportion of love in the soul, then it is possible that any soul might be perfectly holy at its first entrance into heaven, and yet may make sublime advances in holiness hourly.

Can we suppose that innocent Adam, at his very formation in Paradise, knew all the wonders of divine wisdom and goodness, that ever he was designed to attain, had he lived sinless and immortal? And then can we believe, since his knowledge of his Maker's goodness and wisdom was to receive continual advances, that he should admire him no more, and love him no better after a thousand years' converse with him, than he did at his first creation? Now the case of the saints in heaven is much the same. The rule and measure of their duty is their knowledge, and the rule and measure of their knowledge is their own capacity, and their means of discovery. They never fall short of their duty, and therefore they have no sin; and thus their holiness may be every moment perfect, and yet perhaps every moment increasing, as their capacities are enlarged, and receive new discoveries through all the ages of their immortality.

Happy souls, whose aspiring knowledge, and love, and zeal, move onward hourly, and get still nigher to their God! Surely, while they behold his face in the unveiled beauties of his holiness, they shall love him with warmer zeal, and be more abundantly satisfied with his likeness; Psal. xvii. 15.

After all that I have said on this subject, some

will insist on this objection, namely, Can there be any such thing as imperfection in heaven? Is it not said to be a perfect state? Now if the spirits above be always growing in excellency and holiness, then they are always defective and eternally imperfect; which is very hard to suppose concerning the saints in glory, and contrary to the very expression and letter of my text.

The answer to this is very easy, to all that will give their reason leave to exercise itself upon just ideas, and to think and argue beyond the chime of words.

Perfection (as I told you before) is not to be taken here in an absolute, but in a comparative sense; nothing is absolutely perfect but God; and in comparison of God, the highest and most exalted of all creatures is, and will be, eternally imperfect and defective; "The heavens are not pure in his sight, and he charges his angels with folly," Job iv. 18. Even the man Christ Jesus shall for ever fall short of the perfection of the divine nature to which he is united, and in this sense will be imperfect for ever.

But where any creature has attained to such exalted degrees of excellency, as are far superior to what others have attained, it is the custom of the scripture to call them perfect, and that with a design to do honour to their character; so "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation," Gen. vi. 9. Job also has this honour done him. "He was perfect and upright," Job i. 1. And the saints on earth are called perfect in many parts of the word of God, even while they are here on earth, and have many defects and imperfections. So, though it be literally true, that the saints in heaven are continually imperfect in comparison of God and Christ, and of what they themselves shall farther attain; yet the scripture, which delights to do honour to them,

chooses rather to call them perfect, because of the sublime degree of excellencies they possess above their fellow-saints on earth; and it is not fit for us to degrade them in our common language by the diminishing and abasing names of defect and imperfection, though their present perfection and excellency admit of everlasting increase.

If any man, after he has read this treatise thus far, and has duly weighed all the former arguments, can see force enough in this last objection to baffle or destroy them all, or can find terror enough in the mere sound of the word imperfect to forbid his assent; I desire he may not be disturbed in the possession of his own sentiments, till the sweet and surprising sensations of ever-growing felicity convince him, that heaven is a place of glorious improvement.

This shall suffice for the third general head of my discourse, wherein I have shown, that the perfection of the spirits of the just is such a perfection as admits of a rich variety of employments and pleasures, according to the various taste and inclination of the blessed; it allows of their different degrees of felicity, according to their different capacities and preparations; it furnishes each blessed spirit with a frequent change of pleasure, and it gives room for perpetual increase.

SECTION V.

OF THE MEANS OF ATTAINING THIS PERFECTION.

My fourth and last inquiry is this, How do these good spirits of just men arrive at this perfection?

I answer, By the death of the body, and their departure from flesh and blood.

You will ask, what reasons are there why their departure from the body should bring them into

this perfect state? I will content myself to mention these four:

I. Because at death their state of trial is ended, and the time of recompense begins by divine appointment; now all their imperfections must end with their state of trial.

This is the account of things in the scripture, Heb. ix. 27: "It is appointed for men once to die, and after this the judgment." At the hour of death those words are spoken aloud in the most dreadful or most delightful language, Rev. xxii. 11: "He that is unjust or filthy, let him be so still; he that is righteous and holy, let him be so still." And then upon the determination of the state, the reward or recompense follows, ver. 12: "My reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be."

Many inconveniences, and imperfections and difficulties, are proper for a state of trial, and by these methods we are trained up for glory. Christ himself was ignorant of many things in the day of his trial; his knowledge on earth was imperfect, and his joys were so too; for he grew in wisdom and knowledge; he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. "Though he were a son, yet he learned obedience by the things that he suffered," and "the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings;" Heb. v. 8, and ii. 10. But when the time of probation and suffering ceases, then perfection is come, and glory appears.

Hail, blessed spirits above, who have passed your state of trial well! You have run the laborious race under many burdens, and you have received the prize. You have fought with mighty enemies, you have overcome a thousand difficulties, and you enjoy the crown. No more shall you complain of the mixture of error with your knowledge, no more shall you groan under the perplexities of thought,

the tumults of passion, the burdens of indwelling iniquity, nor cry out because of oppressing enemies or sorrows. The hour of your trial is finished. You have been sincere and faithful in your imperfect services, and you are arrived at the world of perfection.

II. At the hour of death the spirits of the just leave all the natural and the sinful infirmities of flesh and blood behind them, which are the causes and springs of a thousand imperfections.

The very natural circumstances and necessities of the body, and the inconveniences that attend it in this frail state, do very much embarrass and clog the spirit in its pursuit of knowledge, or holiness, or divine joy.

The flesh is a dark covering to the soul; it beclouds our ideas, confuses our conceptions, and prevents a clear and distinct knowledge of a thousand objects. It is a dull dark tabernacle for a spirit's residence. It has windows indeed to let in light, but those very windows, like painted or curled glass, too often discolour the objects, or distort the shape of them. These very senses of ours frequently impose upon us in the searches after truth, and represent things, not as they are in themselves, and in their own nature, but as they are useful and hurtful to us; and often we pass a false judgment on the nature of things by their influence, and are led into many mistakes in our inquiries after knowledge.

Our fancy or imagination raises up false images of things, and we forsake the solid and real truth, to follow the shapes, and colours, and appearances of it painted upon fancy.

From our very infancy, our souls are imposed upon by the animal; we draw in early many false judgments, and establish them daily. We are nursed up in prejudice against a hundred truths both in the philosophical, the moral, and the religious life;

and it is the labour of an age even for a wise and good man to wear off a few of them, and to judge with any tolerable freedom, evidence and certainty.

A great part of our life is spent in sleep, wherein the soul is bound up from exerting any regular thoughts, confined every night to a periodical delirium, subjected to all the fluttering tyranny of the animal spirits, and dragged away into all the wild wanderings of dreaming nature; and indeed the thoughts of many of us always, and of all of us sometimes, even when we are awake, are but little better, because we perpetually dance after the motions of passions and fancy, and our reason seldom judges without them. Alas! how imperfect is the best of us in knowledge here!

But knowledge is not the only good of which the body deprives the spirit. The necessities of the body, hunger and thirst, weakness and weariness, and drowsy spirits, sit very heavy upon the soul, and hinder it in the pursuit of holy and heavenly thoughts, break off many a divine meditation, and interrupt and spoil many a delightful piece of worship. In sickness, or in old age, what long and weighty troubles, what tiresome infirmities clog the soul, and what restless pains of nature overwhelm the spirit, and forbid the lively exercises of devotion!

And then also the sinful appetites and perverse affections of nature are very much seated in flesh and blood: so much, that the apostle in many places calls the principles of sin by the general name of flesh. Read the latter end of the seventh chapter of his epistle to the Romans. How does he complain of the flesh and members of the body, which are fatal instruments of sin and Satan! Read the black catalogue of iniquities, Gal. v. 19—21, and hear them called the works of the flesh. Pride, and malice, and envy, and lust, and covetousness, and wrath

and revenge, are found secretly working in flesh and blood. O how much are the springs of these sinful evils seated in the very composition of depraved animal nature! And how is the poor labouring spirit of a saint dreadfully betrayed thereby into frequent actual guilt, even notwithstanding all its care and watchfulness! O wretched men that we are! who shall deliver us! Blessed be God, there is a time of release.

And as our knowledge and our holiness are rendered very imperfect, by reason of these sensible and corrupt engines of flesh and blood, so are the joys and satisfactions of the soul perpetually impaired and diminished hereby. The heart of the saint is in pain to feel sin working in it, and the conscience complains under the anguish of guilt! Blessed be God for the balm that is found in the blood of Christ, to ease the anguish of conscience!

Besides, what spirit can enjoy perfect peace, while it is tied to so many thousand nerves, each of which may become an instrument of intense pain and torture! And the body itself has sharp humours enough in it to corrode those nerves, and fill the indwelling spirit with agonies. What millions of seeds of painful disease lurk in animal nature, that render this body a most uncomfortable dwelling! And how many thousand strokes and accidents are we liable to from abroad, whence new pains and sorrows are derived to the soul! The wind and the weather, the rain and the hail, and the scorching sun, the air, the water, and fire, and every element, may afflict the animal, and pain the unhappy spirit.

But O happy souls, that are free from all the cumbersome and mischievous influences of flesh and blood!—from these instruments of iniquity, and springs of deadly guilt and torment! Happy souls, that are released from sick and languishing bodies,

from feeble and burdensome limbs, and all the tiresome and painful disorders of dying nature! that are raised beyond the reach and injury of all these lower elements, these mediums of disease and pain! Rejoice and triumph, ye prisoners newly discharged; ye feel the pleasurable truths that we guess at, but ye feel and enjoy them with a relish of sublime pleasure beyond all our conjectures. Rejoice and exult in your new liberty, like a bird released from the imprisoning cage, and sing with sweetest notes to the praise of your Redeemer. O worship and serve him in the full freedom of all your active powers; attend at his feet with intense delight, and love him with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.

III. By the death of the body, and their release from it, these spirits of the just are free from all the tempting powers and the sinful influences of earth and hell.

This world of sensible allurements, and this world of sinful men, has a mighty influence on the spirits of the saints, while they dwell in flesh and blood. How often are we deceived into practices of iniquity by the enticing vanities of this life! How often tempted by evil companions, by flattering mischiefs and insnaring circumstances! And many times too the fear of men, and the terror of their threatenings, fright us to a neglect of duty, or hurry us into the commission of some active iniquity. Sometimes the pleasing enjoyments of life tie our hearts to the creature by the bands of excessive love; and sometimes the injuries and reproaches we receive from them kindle our fiery passions, and rouse up our sinful wrath and revenge.

This world also is much under the evil influences of the prince of darkness; he is called the god of this world; it is greatly given up to the ravages of the roaring lion, and he worries the spirits of the saints while they dwell within his territories,

though he is not suffered to destroy and devour them.

But at the moment of death the happy spirit is released from the senses, and thereby from the impressions of all sensible things. All the flattering vanities of this lower world have no more power to entice the soul, than the grossest sensualities could entice a pure angel. Sinful companions can no more invite, and threatening tyrants have no more power to terrify.

The spirit is then got out of the territories of Satan; he is prince of the power of the air, but his dominion reaches no farther. The heaven where Christ is, never admits him. Michael with his angels hath cast out the old dragon and his angels, and there is no more place found for them there. Happy spirits, delivered and secured from the devil and the world at once, and from all their tempting and destructive influences!

Now when a sanctified soul is thus released both from its union to sinful flesh and blood, and from all possible assaults of the powers of earth and hell, it may be worth inquiring, Whether this release be not sufficient of itself to render the work of sanctification complete, and bring it to a state of perfection, supposing still the ordinary concurrence or influence of the sanctifying Spirit. Or whether there must be any immediate, almighty, and present change wrought in the soul by a new and extraordinary influence of the blessed Spirit at the very moment of death, by which sanctification is at once completed. Which of these is true, I know not. I confess this last has generally been the opinion of our protestant writers; and perhaps it may be the truth; but the scripture is silent.

Who can tell therefore whether a holy soul, that has received the divine seed of grace, (which is called the divine nature) and is regenerated and

renewed, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, has not all its remaining sins and imperfections owing to its bonds of sinful flesh and blood? And whether its compliance with so many temptations is not to be attributed to its close attachment to corrupt animal nature and sensible things? And therefore whether this sanctified nature would not become completely free from sin, when it is freed from all the influence of a tempting body and a tempting world? Whether the divine bent and bias that is given it by the Spirit of God at first conversion, and by which it maintains continual opposition to sinful flesh, would not make its own way toward perfection without new and extraordinary operations? Whether this would not be sufficient to cause the soul for ever to ascend naturally toward God in desire, and love, and delight, when all clogs and embarrassments are removed? So a vessel filled with upper air, and dragged down by some heavy weight to the bottom of the sea, labours and wrestles with the uneasy burden, and hath a perpetual tendency toward this upper region; but if the weight be once taken off, it immediately of itself rises through the water, and never ceases its motion till it comes to the surface.

I confess this is a nicer speculation, and of doubtful evidence: though when St. Paul lays his sinful compliances and captivity so much to the charge of his flesh and members, in the seventh chapter to the Romans, and in other places of his writings, one would be ready to think St. Paul was of this opinion. However, this we are sure of, that a sanctified soul released from the body shall be made free from every sin, and its absence from flesh and the world have a large, if not a sufficient influence to effect this freedom.

And if we should grant it, that a soul just dismissed from this world is not perfectly sanctified by

the mere influence of this release; yet this perfection is sufficiently secured by its dismission from flesh; for when absent from the body, it is present with the Lord; and this leads me to the next particular, namely,

IV. At death the spirits of the just, released from bodies, enter into another state, a different world, where they have a thousand advantages for improvement in knowledge, and advances in holiness and joy, vastly beyond what any thing in this world could furnish them with.

They see God, and are for ever with him. They behold him face to face, as I have before explained it, in a more immediate and intuitive manner; and doubtless such a sight fills the spirit with a clearer and brighter idea of the nature and attributes of God, than all the former lessons it had learnt in the books of nature and of scripture could ever give it.

They see our Lord Jesus Christ, our glorified Saviour, in such a way and manner as glorified separate spirits can converse with spirits imbodied; and one such a view as this will perhaps lead us into more intimate acquaintance with his human nature and his united Godhead, than many years of converse with him by all the mediums of ordinances, those divine glasses wherein we see him darkly, (as the apostle speaks) and whereby God and Christ represent and manifest themselves to saints on earth.

And as our knowledge shall receive immense and surprising improvements by these new methods of discovery, so I think it shall in due proportion advance our holiness or conformity to God the Father, and his brightest image, Christ Jesus; for we cannot behold them in such a manner without a glorious transformation into their likeness, as I have hinted already.

When a soul that has a new nature given it by sanctifying grace, is placed in the immediate view and presence of God the most holy, it will ever be growing into a greater degree of nearness and love, and it will be powerfully changed more and more into the likeness of God himself, as a needle when placed within the reach of a loadstone's attractive power, ceases not its motion till it be joined in perfect union, and itself acquires the virtues of that wonderful mineral.

Nor is it possible in heaven that we should advance in knowledge and holiness, without an equal improvement in felicity and joy. On earth indeed we are told, "He that will live godly, shall suffer persecution;" and "He that increases knowledge, increases sorrow;" 2 Tim. iii. 12, and Eccl. i. 18. But as heaven is high above the earth, so are the customs and the blessings of that state superior to this; for there are no present sorrows to be known, nor any future to be feared; and holiness has no enemy there. All things round the saint shall have a tendency to promote his blessedness.

The spirit of a good man released from the body, and ascending to heaven, is surrounded with thousands and ten thousands of blessed spirits of the human and angelic order; when it gets within the confines of the heavenly country, it sweetly and insensibly acquires the genius and temper of the inhabitants; it breathes, as it were, a new air, and lives, and thinks, and acts just as they do. It shines and burns with new degrees of knowledge, zeal, and love, and exults in the transporting communications of the same joy.

How vastly shall our understandings be improved by the kind narratives and instructions of the saints that arrived at heaven before us, and by converse with the ministering angels!

You will say, perhaps, that we shall have no need

of their teaching when we get to heaven, for we shall be near to God himself, and receive all immediately from him.

But has the scripture any where excluded the assistance of our fellow-spirits? God can teach us here on earth immediately by his own Spirit, without the use of books and letters, without the help of prophets and ministers, men of like passions with ourselves; and yet he chooses rather to do it in an instrumental way, and makes his creatures in the lower world the means of our instruction under the superior influences of his own Spirit; and why may he not use the same methods to communicate knowledge to the spirits that newly arrive at that upper world?

There we shall see the patriarchs of the old world and prophets of the old dispensation, as well as the apostles and evangelists of Christ and his gospel. There we shall be conversant with those blessed angels whom he has used as ministers of his vengeance, or his mercy, to persons and churches, families and nations: and they will not be unwilling to inform us of those great and surprising transactions of God with men.

There we shall find a multitude of other eminent saints before and after Christ.

Adam doubtless will take a peculiar pleasure in acquainting all his happy posterity with the special form and terms of the covenant of innocency; he shall tell us the nature of the trees of knowledge and of life, and how fatally he fell, to the ruin of his unborn offspring. Unhappy father, deriving iniquity and death down to his children! But with what immense satisfaction and everlasting surprise he views the second Adam his Son and his Saviour, and stands in adoration and transport, while he beholds millions of his seed that he once ruined, now raised to superior glories above the promises of the law of

works, by the intervening influence of a Mediator! Enoch, the man that walked with God, and Elijah, the great reformer, shall instruct us how they were translated to heaven, and passed into a blessed immortality without calling at the gates of death. Noah will relate to his sons among the blessed, what was the wickedness of the old world before the flood, that provoked God their Maker to drown them all; he shall entertain us with the wonders of the ark, and the covenant of the rainbow in all its glorious colours. Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God, shall talk over again with us his familiar converse with God and angels in their frequent apparitions to him, and shall tell us how much the promised seed transcends all the poor low ideas he had of him in his obscure age of prophecy. For we cannot suppose that all intimate converse with our father Abraham shall be forbidden us, by any of the laws or manners of that heavenly country, since heaven itself is described by our sitting down as at one table with Abraham, and dwelling in his bosom; Mat. viii. 11; and Luke xiv. 15; and xvi. 23.

There Paul and Moses shall join together to give us an account of the Jewish law, and read wondrous and entertaining lectures on the types and figures of that economy, and still lead our thoughts to the glorious Antitype with surprising encomiums of the blessed Jesus. Paul shall unfold to us the dark places of his own writings better than he himself once understood them; and Moses shall become an interpreter of his own law, who knew so little of the mystery and beauty of it on earth himself.

There we shall acquaint ourselves with some of the ancient fathers of the Christian church, and the martyrs, those dying champions of the faith and honours of the Christian name. These will recount the various providences of God to the church in their several ages, and show the visions of St. John in the

book of the Revelation, not in the morning twilight of prophecy, but as in the light of noon, as a public history, or as an evening rehearsal of the transactions of the day. The witnesses themselves shall tell us how they prophesied in sackcloth, and were slain by the Man of Sin; how they rose from the dead in three days and a half, and how the church was at last reformed from the popish mysteries of iniquity and superstition. Cranmer and Ridley, Calvin and Luther, and the rest of the pious reformers, shall make known to us the labours and sufferings of their age, and the wonders of pure Christianity rising as it were out of the grave, and throwing off the chains, the darkness, and defilements of Antichrist; and those holy souls who laboured in the reformation of Great Britain, while they relate the transactions of their day, shall perhaps inquire and wonder why their successors put a stop to that blessed work, and have made no farther progress in a hundred and fifty years.

Did one of the elders near the throne give notice to the apostle John concerning the martyrs, Rev. vii. 14: "These are they which came out of great tribulations, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb;" and shall we not suppose that the happy spirits above tell one another their victories over sin and temptation, and the powers of this world? Shall not the martyrs, who triumphed in their own blood, and overcame Satan and Antichrist by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony, shall they not make it known to the inhabitants of the upper world, and tell it to the honour of Christ, their Captain and their King, how they fought, and died, and conquered? Methinks I hear these noble historians rehearsing their sacred tragedy; how they entertain a bright circle of listening angels and fellow-spirits

with their own glorious and dreadful story, dreadful to suffer, and glorious to relate!

Shall it be objected here, that all the glorified saints cannot be supposed to maintain immediate discourse with those blessed ancients? Can those ancients be imagined to repeat the same stories perpetually afresh, to entertain every stranger that is newly arrived at heaven?

I answer, That since one single spirit dwelling in flesh can communicate his thoughts immediately to five or six thousand hearers at once by his voice, and to millions more successively by books and writing, it is very unreasonable to suppose, that spirits made perfect and glorified have not a power of communicating their thoughts to many more thousands by immediate converse; and it is past our reach to conceive what unknown methods may be in use amongst them, to transmit their ideas and narratives in a much swifter succession than by books and writings, through all the courts of heaven, and to inform all the new comers, without putting each happy spirit to the everlasting labour of a tiresome repetition.

Though every saint in heaven should not be admitted to immediate and speedy converse with these spirits of renown in past ages, yet doubtless these glorious minds have communicated their narratives and the memoirs of their age, to thousands of that blessed world already, and from them we may receive a repetition of the same wonders with faithfulness and exact truth. History and chronology are no precarious and uncertain sciences in that country.

It is very probable indeed, that we shall have more intimate nearness to, and more familiar communion with those spirits that were of the same age and place with ourselves, and of the same church or family; for we can more delightfully expatiate in

our converse with them about the same providences and the same methods of grace, and agreeably entertain and improve each other with notices of the affairs of the upper and lower worlds.

Nor must we suppose such sort of historical converse among the blessed spirits is merely designed to fill the mind with new and strange ideas. This pleasure, considered by itself, is not sacred enough for the spirits of the just made perfect. There is not a narrative in the world, but shall disclose some wondrous instances of divine wisdom or mercy, power or faithfulness, patience and forgiveness, or wrath and justice. The speaker shall feel the workings of all proper reverence, zeal, and love; and every hearer shall be impressed with correspondent affections, and join in adoration and holy wonder.

And while we speak of the means and advantages that glorified spirits enjoy for their improvement in all the parts of their felicity, surely we may expect the greatest and the best assistances, even those of the Holy Spirit, to render all these means more effectual. Is he not promised "to abide with us, to be in us, and dwell with us for ever?" John xiv. 16, 17. Is he not represented as dwelling in the spirits of the just made perfect, when it is said, "The Spirit that dwelleth in them shall raise their mortal bodies from the dead?" Rom. viii. 11. May we not then reasonably infer, that that glorious Spirit, who has been our Enlightener, our Comforter, and our Sanctifier on earth, will be our perpetual Enlightener, our eternal Sanctifier, and our everlasting Comforter? He that has so wonderfully begun the divine work in us, and laid foundations of joy in knowledge and holiness, will he not finish and perfect his own work, and add the top-stone to crown the heavenly building?

O blessed state of spirits discharged from the prison of flesh and this world! this wicked world,

where Satan, the evil spirit, has so wide a range, and so poisonous an influence, and where sinful men swarm on every side, and bear the largest sway! Of what divine advantages are you possessed for the improvement of all your sacred excellencies and joys! When we can raise our thoughts a little, and survey your privileges, we feel somewhat of an inward wish to dwell among you, and send a breathing meditation, or a glance of warm desire towards your world and your society. We poor prisoner-spirits, when we hear such tidings from the country at which you are arrived, we stretch our wings a little, and are ready to wish for the flight. But God our Sovereign must appoint the hour; he sees that we are not yet refined enough. Keep our souls, O Father, in this erect posture, looking, reaching, and longing for the celestial world, till thou hast completely prepared us for the promised glory, and then give us the joyful word of dismission.

Thus I have endeavoured to make it appear on what accounts a dismission from the body is both the season when, and the means by which the spirits of the just arrive at this perfection. Their state of trial is ended at death, and therefore all inconveniences and imperfections must cease by divine appointment; by death the soul is released from all the troublesome and tempting influences of flesh and blood; it is delivered from this sinful world, it is got beyond the reach of Satan the tempter and the tormentor; and it is surrounded with a thousand advantages for improvement in knowledge, holiness, and joy.

SECTION VI.

REMARKS ON THE FOREGOING DISCOURSE.

Remark I. Are the spirits of the just made perfect at the death of the body, then we may be

assured that they neither die nor sleep; for sleep and death are both inconsistent with this state of perfection which I have described.

The dead saints are not lost nor extinct. They are not perished out of God's world, though they are gone from ours. They are no more in the world that is enlightened by the sun and moon, and the glimmering stars; but they themselves shine gloriously, like stars of different magnitude, in the world where there is no sun, nor is there any need of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God enlightens it and the Lamb is the everlasting light thereof; Rev. xxi. 23. They are lost from earth, but they are found in heaven. They are dead to us at present, but they are alive to God their Father, and to Jesus their Saviour; they are alive to the holy angels, and to all their fellow-saints in that upper world.

If there had been any such thing as a soul sleeping or dying, our Saviour would never have argued thus with the Sadducees, Luke xx. 37, 38, nor have proved the doctrine of the resurrection, from the doctrine of the separate state of souls: it is as if he had said, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are dead long ago, but God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still. Now God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living; therefore the souls of those patriarchs are yet alive, for they all live to God in the separate state, and they shall appear in their complete human nature, soul and body, at the resurrection. This is the language and the force of our Saviour's argument, and therefore I must believe the soul of Abraham is alive now.

When Jesus promises the penitent thief upon the cross, Luke xxiii. 43, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," can we persuade ourselves that he intended no more than that the thief should be with him in the grave, or in a state of indolence and in-

sensibility? Does he not assure him in these words, that there is a state of happiness for spirits dismissed from the body, whither the soul of our Lord Jesus was going, and where the dying penitent should find him.

So, when the infidel Jews stoned Stephen the first martyr, Acts vii. 59, while he expressed his faith and hope in these words, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," was this spirit of his to be laid asleep till the resurrection? Can we suppose the dying saint would have made such a request upon so lethargic a principle, and in the view of such a stupid state? No, surely; for he expected, and desired, and prayed to be received to dwell where Christ is, and to behold that glory which he had a glimpse of in the agonies of death.

Would the apostle Paul have been so willing to be absent from the body, where he did much service for his Saviour, if he had not a joyful view of being present with the Lord? as he expresses it, 2 Cor. v. 8. What doth he mean by this blessed language of presence with the Lord, if his soul was to lie asleep in a senseless and inactive state till the second coming of Jesus? Or would he have told the Philippians, ch. i. ver. 23, that he had "a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better," if he had hoped for no advantage for his spirit by it, but a mere stupid indolence and rest in the silent grave?

Besides, we are told of rebellious spirits that are in prison, 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20, and of "Sodom and Gomorrah suffering the vengeance of eternal fire," Jude 7. Whether this be material fire, or merely a metaphor to express torment, is not necessary to inquire here; but surely we can never imagine that the justice of God has provided the prison of hell and fiery torments for the souls of the wicked, separate from bodies, and yet that the mercy and goodness

of God has provided no heaven of happiness for the spirits of those that have loved, honoured, and obeyed him all the days they dwelt in the flesh. There is, then, there is certainly, a state of happiness prepared for holy souls immediately after death.

When we think of our pious friends departed, our foolish imagination is too ready to indulge and improve our sorrow. We sit solitary in the parlour and the chamber: we miss them there, and we cry, "They are lost." We retire melancholy to the closet, and bewail a lost father, or lost mother, or perhaps a nearer and dearer relative. We miss them in our daily conversation, we miss them in all their friendly offices, and their endearing sensible characters, and we are ready to say again, "Alas! they are lost." This is the language of flesh and blood, of sense and fancy. Come, let our faith teach us to think and speak of them under a more cheerful and more just representation: they are not utterly lost, for they are present with Christ and with God. They are departed our world, where all things are imperfect, to those upper regions where light and perfection dwell. They have left their offices and stations here among us, but they are employed in a far more divine manner, and have new stations and nobler offices on high. Their places on earth indeed know them no more, but their places in heaven know them well, even those glorious mansions that were prepared for them from the foundation of the world. Their place is empty in the earthly sanctuary, and in the days of solemn assembly, but they appear above in the heavenly Jerusalem as fair pillars and ornaments in the temple of God on high, and shall for ever dwell with him there.

It is a very natural inquiry now, But where are these places of blessed spirits? What part of the creation is it, in which they have their residence? Is it above or below the sun? Is their habitation

in any of the planetary or starry worlds? Or are they fled beyond them all? Where is the proper place of their presence?

Let me propose a brief answer to these curious questions in a few propositions.

1. The chief properties of spirits are knowledge and activity; and they are said to be present there, where they have an immediate perception of any thing, and where they lay out their immediate activity or influence. So our souls are said to be present with our bodies, because they have immediate consciousness or knowledge of what relates to the body, and they move it, and act upon it, or influence it, in an immediate manner.

2. God, the infinite Spirit, has an immediate and universal presence; that is, he is immediately conscious of, and acquainted with every thing that passes in all the known and unknown parts of the creation, and by his preserving and governing power manages all things. Wheresoever he displays his glory to separate spirits, that is heaven; and where he exerts his vengeance, that is hell.

3. Finite spirits have not such an immediate and universal presence. Their knowledge and their activity are confined to certain parts of the creation; and wheresoever they are, if they are under the immediate influences of divine glory, they are in heaven; if of his vengeance, they are in hell.

4. They are usually represented as having some relation to a particular place or places; because while we dwell in flesh and blood, we know not how to conceive of their presence so well any other way; and therefore they may be described in scripture or in common discourse, as being in heaven and above the heavens, and in the third heaven, and as coming down to earth, &c., according as they are supposed to put forth any actions there, or to have an immediate cognizance of things that are done in those places;

for the chief notion we have of the presence of spirits is their immediate consciousness, and their immediate agency.

5. But if they are provided with any subtile ethereal bodies (which are called vehicles) in and by which they act as soon as they leave flesh and blood, then they may properly be said to reside in those places where their vehicles are, even as our souls at present are said to be in a room, or a closet, or a field, because our bodies are there, in and by which they act.

6. There must be some place where the glorified body of Christ is, and the souls of departed saints are, in some sense, with him. There Enoch and Elijah are in their immortal bodies, and other saints who rose at the resurrection of Christ. They may be (for aught we know) in or among some of the planets, or amongst the stars; though the distance of the stars is so prodigious and amazing, according to the exactest calculations of the new philosophy, that if the motion of a spirit or glorified body were no swifter than that of a cannon-bullet, they would not get so far as the stars in a thousand ages; nor would the journey of so swift a traveller to any of the planets (except the moon) cost less than the labour of several years.

7. These things are so puzzling to our reason, so confound our imagination, and so far transcend the reach of our present faculties to inquire and determine, that it is sufficient for us to know and believe, that the spirits of the just made perfect have an existence under the blissful influences of the grace and glory of God. And though we freely speak of them, and the scripture leads us to conceive of them, as dwelling in a world of light, and in some special place of magnificence, and apartments of glory, or as moving from one place to another; yet perhaps it is to be understood chiefly in condescension to the

weakness of our present capacities, or in relation to vehicles to which they may be united. But our ignorance in these matters shall be no hinderance to our arrival at heaven, if we tread the paths of faith and holiness, though we know not in what part of the creation it lies.

I proceed to the second remark.

Remark 2. If all the spirits of the just that depart from this world are made perfect, then there is much better company above than there is below. The society in heaven is much more agreeable than the best society on earth.

Here we meet with a multitude of sinners; they are ready to mingle in all the affairs of life, and sometimes hypocrites join with us in the sacred ordinances of the sanctuary. The apostle himself has told us, that in the civil concerns of this life we cannot avoid them; for if we will keep no company with sinners, we must have nothing to do in this world, we must needs go out of it, 1 Cor. v. 10. But in the world above there are none but saints, no inhabitant there but what is holy. There are no persons there that will tempt or defile us, or lead us astray from the paths of purity or peace. Holiness to the Lord is inscribed on every soul there; nor is there one Canaanite in that upper house of the Lord of hosts; Zech. xiv. 21.

But this is not all. For there are many of the saints themselves here on earth that make but very indifferent companions. Some of them are shamefully ignorant, imprudent, and foolish; and we have much ado to bear with their folly. Some of them are morose and contentious, captious and peevish, envious and censorious, and ready to take offence on the slightest occasions; a look or a smile placed wrong shall disoblige them, a mistaken word shall affront them for a month, and it is very hard work to humour and please them; or we ourselves

perhaps are foolish and imprudent, we are peevish and resentful, and our fellow-Christians have as much to do to bear with us or to please us. There are some persons, concerning whom we have reason to hope, that their hearts in the main are right with God, but either by the iniquity of their animal natures or the power of their temptations, they look so like the men of this world, that it is hard to distinguish them, and their society is dangerous, or at least very unprofitable and undesirable. Some of us fall into gross mistakes, and lead our friends into error, and hand in hand we forsake the truth. Some of us are melancholy, and sit in darkness; then we spread a gloom and heaviness over all our conversation, and banish all the joys of earth and heaven; or at best (it may be) and in our sprightly days, we fill up the visiting hour with trifles and impertinencies, and there is little of heavenly and divine conversation among us. Poor low grovelling subjects furnish our tongues, and entertain our ears, because we are so very imperfect here on earth in knowledge, in holiness or in divine joy.

But what a glorious difference is there in the society above, where we may be secure from all mistake and falsehood, from all impertinence and folly in the longest discourse or conference! for every spirit there is so perfect in knowledge, as to be free from error, and has so divine a turn of mind, that nothing relishes but what is holy and heavenly. No quarrels, no complaints are found there to imbitter our converse, to diminish the pleasure of society, or to draw the heart away from God.

If we would know what the society of heaven is, let us renew the memory of the wisest and holiest, the kindest and the best companions that we were ever acquainted with here on earth; let us recollect the most pleasing hours that we have enjoyed in their society; let us divest them of all their mistakes

and weaknesses, of all their sins and imperfections; and then by faith and hope let us divest ourselves of all our own guilt and follies too; let us fancy ourselves engaged with them in delightful discourse on the most divine and most affecting subjects, and our hearts mutually raising each other near to God, and communicating mutual joys; this is the state of the blessed, this the conversation of heaven, this and more than this shall be our entertainment when we arrive at those happy regions.

This thought would very naturally lead me to the mention of our honoured and departed friend, but I withhold myself a little, and must detain your expectation till I have made a remark or two more.

Remark 3. Are the spirits of the just, who are departed from earth, made perfect in heaven; then they are not the proper subjects for our perpetual sorrows and endless complaints. Let us moderate our grief therefore, for that very providence that has fixed them in perfect holiness and joy.

We lament their absence, and our loss indeed is great; but the spirit of Christian friendship should teach us to rejoice in their exaltation. Is it no pleasure to think of them as released from all the bonds of infirm nature, from the pains of mortality, and the disquietudes of a sinful world? Is it not better to lift our eyes upward, and view a parent or a beloved friend adorned with perfect grace and complete in glory, exulting in the fulness of joy near the throne of God, than to behold him labouring under the tiresome disorders of old age, groaning under the anguish and torment of acute distempers, and striving with the troublesome attendants of this sinful and painful state? Do we profess fondness and affection for those that are gone, and shall we not please ourselves a little in their happiness, or at least abate our mourning? Does not St. Paul tell the Corinthians, "This is what we wish, even your

perfection?" 2 Cor. xiii. 9, and should not saints, in the lower world, take some satisfaction, when a fellow-saint is arrived at the sum of his own wishes, even perfect holiness and joy on high?

But I correct myself here; nature must have its way, and be indulged a little; let it express its sensible pain at the loss of such endearments. A long separation from those who are so near akin to us in flesh and blood, will touch the heart in a painful place, and awaken the tenderest springs of sorrow. The sluices must be allowed to be held open a little; nature seems to demand it as a debt to love, and grace does not utterly forbid it. When Lazarus died, Jesus groaned and wept, John xi. 33, 35.

Yet let not sorrow triumph and reign, and, like a flood, break over all its bounds; rather give the stream of it a little diversion into a better channel. Come, let us take the advice which our blessed Saviour gives to the daughters of Jerusalem, who attended him to his cross with tears; Luke xxiii. 28. Weep not for me, but if ye must weep, do it for yourselves and your children; because you are still left in the valley of sin and sorrow, while the saints departed are arrived at the land of peace, and their feet stand upon the mountains of paradise.

Could the voice of those blessed spirits made perfect reach our ears, we should hear them speak in the language of their Lord: "Weep not for us, but for yourselves: you are still encompassed with temptations and difficulties, we have surmounted them all: you are wrestling with many errors, and entangled in dark and noisy controversies; we are perfect in knowledge, and see divine mysteries in a divine light: you are labouring in the race; we are crowned, and have received the prize; you are still striving in the field of battle, and we well remember the toilsome and painful conflict. We pity

you, and call you rather to weep for yourselves than for us; we have finished all the war through divine grace, and are secure in the city of triumph: you are yet travelling through the valley of tears; we are refreshing ourselves in the gardens of pleasure, and on hills of everlasting gladness. Hold on with courage, and faith, and patience; there are mansions of joy prepared for you also, and we wait your happy arrival.

Remark 4. Are the spirits of just men in heaven made perfect, in the same excellencies and privileges which they possessed on earth? then if our curiosity, or our love has a mind to know what are the circumstances of our pious friends departed, or how they are employed above, let us review what they were here below, and how they employed themselves when they were with us; for, as I told you, in this life we are trained up for the life of glory; we shall then be advanced to a glorious and transcendent degree of the same graces; and there will be something in the future state of rewards answerable and correspondent to the present state of labour and trial.

This thought necessarily calls our meditations backward a little, to take a short survey of some peculiar characters of our excellent friend departed, that we may learn to rejoice in the present perfection of his graces and glories.

SECTION VII.

THE CHARACTER OF THE DECEASED.

When I name Sir John Hartopp, all that knew him will agree that I name a gentleman, a scholar, and a Christian; and neither of these characters, in the best and most valuable sense of them, could forsake him at his entrance into heaven.

He shone with eminence among the persons of birth and title* on earth; while his obliging deportment and his affable temper rendered him easy of access to all his inferiors, and made him the delight of all his friends. Though he knew what was due to his quality in this world, yet he affected none of the grandeurs of life, but daily practised condescension and love, and secured the respect of all, without assuming a superior air.

Then surely he carried this temper with him to the upper world, where gentleness and goodness reign in the highest perfection; and doubtless he practises now all the same graces of conversation among the blessed spirits there, but in a far superior manner, according to the unknown laws and customs of that region of light and love.

He had a taste for universal learning; and ingenious arts were his delight from his youth. He pursued knowledge in various forms, and was acquainted with many parts of human science. Mathematical speculations and practices, were a favourite study with him in his younger years; and even to his old age, he maintained his acquaintance with the motions of the heavenly bodies, and light and shade by which time is measured.

And may we not suppose that there are entertainments amongst the works of God on high to feast the spirits of such a genius? May they not in that upper region look down and survey the various contrivances of divine wisdom, which created all things in these lower worlds in number, weight, and measure? May not our exalted friend give glory there to his Maker in the contemplation of the same heavenly bodies, though he dwells in the region

* His grandfather, Sir Edward Hartopp, was created a baronet by king James I., 1619, which was but a few years after the first institution of that order.

where night and shadows are never known, and above the need or use of sunbeams?

But the book of God was his chief study, and his most divine delight. His Bible lay before him night and day; and he was well acquainted with the writers that explained it best. He was desirous of seeing what the Spirit of God said to men in the original languages. For this end, he commenced some acquaintance with Hebrew when he was more than fifty years old; and that he might be capable of judging of the true sense of any text in the New Testament, he kept his youthful knowledge of the Greek language, in some measure, even to the period of his life.

But earthly languages are of little use in heaven. There are too many defects and ambiguities in them to express the bright, the complete, and the distinct ideas of separate spirits. We may allow our learned friend, therefore, to be divested of these when he dropped mortality. Now he is out of the body, and caught up to dwell in Paradise, where St. Paul made heretofore a short visit, 2 Cor. xii. 2, 4: he hears and speaks those unspeakable words, it is not possible for a mortal tongue to utter. The things of heaven are not to be expressed in any foreign language.

Among the various themes of Christian contemplation, he took peculiar pleasure in the doctrines of grace, in the display of the glories of the person of Christ, God in our nature, and the wondrous work of redemption by his cross. He adored him as his Lord and his God; and while he trusted in his righteousness as the great Mediator, and beheld him as his crucified Saviour, he was ever zealous to maintain the honours due to his divine nature and majesty.

And we may be sure this is a study in which he is still engaged, and he spends the days of his eternity in the pleasurable contemplations of his

glorified Redeemer, and the sacred mysteries of his cross, and his throne, which things the angels desire to pry into.

His practice in life was agreeable to his Christian principles; for he knew that the grace of God, that brings salvation to men, teaches them to deny all ungodliness and to live sober, righteous, and religious lives, that in all things they may adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour.

Now that this part of his character is continued and exalted in the region of the blessed spirits, is too evident to need any amplification or proof; for holiness in every part of it is made perfect there, and all under the sweet constraint of love.

His conversation was pious and learned, ingenious and instructive; he was inquisitive into the affairs of the learned world, the progress of arts and sciences, the concerns of the nation, and the interest of the church of Christ; and upon all occasions was as ready to communicate as he was to inquire. What he knew of the things of God or man, he resolved not to know them only for himself, but for the benefit of all that had the honour of his acquaintance. There are many of his friends that will join with me to confess, how often we have departed from his company refreshed and advanced in some useful knowledge. And I reckon it among the blessings of heaven, when I review those five years of pleasure and improvement, which I spent in his family in my younger part of life; and I found much instruction myself, where I was to be called an instructor.

Nor can I think such inquiries and such communications as are suitable to the affairs of the upper world, are unpractised among the spirits of just men made perfect there; for man is a sociable creature, and enjoys communion with his fellow-saints there, as well as with his Maker and his Saviour. Nor can

the spirit of our honoured and departed friend be a stranger to the pleasures of society amongst his fellow-spirits in those blessed mansions.

His zeal for the welfare of his country, and of the church of Christ in it, carried him out to the most expensive and toilsome services in his younger and his middle age. He employed his time, his spirits, his interest and his riches for the defence of this poor nation, when forty years ago it was in the utmost danger of popery and ruin.*

And doubtless the spirits of the just in heaven are not utterly unacquainted with the affairs of the kingdom of Christ on earth. He rejoices and will rejoice among his fellow-saints, when happy tidings of the militant church, or of the religious interests of Great Britain, are brought to the upper world by ministering angels. He waits there for the full accomplishment of all the promises of Christ to his church, when it shall be freed from sins and sorrows, from persecutions and all mixtures of superstition, and shall be presented to God the Father a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle, in perfect beauty and joy.

His doors were ever open, and his carriage always friendly and courteous to the ministers of the gospel, though they were distinguished among themselves by names of different parties; for he loved all that loved our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

He chose indeed to bear a part in constant public worship with the protestant dissenters, for he thought their practice more agreeable to the rules of the gospel; he joined himself in communion with one of their churches, which was under the pastoral

* He was three times chosen representative in parliament for the county of Leicestershire, in those years when a sacred zeal for liberty and religion strove hard to bring in the bill of exclusion, to prevent the Duke of York (afterwards king James II.) from inheriting the crown of England.

care of the reverend Dr. John Owen, where he continued an honourable member under successive pastors till the day of his death. Nor was he ashamed to own and support that despised interest, nor to frequent those assemblies, when the spirit of persecution raged highest in the days of king Charles and king James the Second. He was a present refuge for the oppressed, and the special providence of God secured him and his friends from the fury of the oppressor. He was always a devout and diligent attendant on public ordinances till the last years of his life, when the infirmities of age growing upon him, confined him to his private retirements.

But if age confined him, death gave him a release. He is exalted now to the church in heaven, and has taken his place in that glorious assembly, where he worships among them before the throne; where he has no need to relieve his memory by the swiftness of his pen, which was his perpetual practice in the church on earth, and by which means he often entertained his family in the evening worship on the Lord's day with excellent discourses; some of which he copied from the lips of some of the greatest preachers of the last age; there his unbodied spirit is able to sustain the sublimest raptures of devotion, which run through the worshippers in that heavenly state; though here on earth I have sometimes seen the pious pleasure too strong for him; and while he has been reading the things of God to his household, the devotion of his heart has fallen through his eyes, has interrupted his voice, and commanded a sacred pause and silence.

He enjoyed an intimate friendship with that great and venerable man, Dr. Owen, and this was mutually cultivated with zeal and delight on both sides, till death divided them. The world has already been acquainted, that it is to the pious industry of Sir John Hartopp, that we are indebted for many of

those sermons and discourses of the doctor, which have been lately published in folio. A long and familiar acquaintance enabled him also to furnish many memoirs, or matters of fact, toward that brief account of the doctor's life, which is prefixed to that volume, though it was drawn up in the present form with various enlargements, by another hand.

Now can we suppose two such souls to have been so happily intimate on earth, and may we not imagine they have found each other among the brighter spirits on high? May we not indulge ourselves to believe that our late honoured friend hath been congratulated on his arrival by that holy man that assisted to direct and lead him thither?

Nor is it improbable that he has found other happy souls there who were numbered among his pious acquaintance on earth. Shall I mention that excellent man, Sir Thomas Abney, who was his late forerunner to heaven, and had not finished two months there before Sir John Hartopp's arrival? Happy spirits! May I congratulate your meeting in the celestial regions! But the world and the churches mourn your absence; and the Protestant dissenters lament the loss of two of their fairest ornaments and honours.

And is there not the same reason to believe, that our departed friend hath by this time renewed his sacred endearments with those kindred spirits that were once related to him in some of the nearest bonds of flesh and blood? There they rejoice together in unknown satisfaction, they wait and long for the arrival of those whom they left behind, and for whose immortal welfare they had a solicitous concern in the state of their mortality.

This thought opens my way to address the posterity, the kindred, and the friends of the deceased, in the fifth remark.

SECTION VIII.

AN ADDRESS TO THE FRIENDS AND RELATIVES OF THE DECEASED.

REMARK 5. If the perfection of blessed spirits above consists in a glorious increase of those virtues and graces which were begun below, let us see to it, then, that those graces and those virtues are begun in us here, or they will never be perfected in us hereafter. If our spirits have nothing of that divine righteousness wrought in them on earth, we can never be admitted into the company of the spirits of the righteous made perfect in heaven.

It is an old saying among divines, but it is a most rational and a certain truth, that grace is glory begun, and glory is but grace perfected. The saints above have the same divine nature, the same sanctified inclinations, and are engaged in many of the same sacred employments with the saints below, but all in a superior degree, and in a more transcendent manner.

As for you, my friends, who have the happiness and honour to be descended from such parents, or to be nearly related to such saints, you have seen the virtues and graces, the exemplary character and piety of them who are gone before: you have had many bright and shining examples in your family; you are the children of the blessed of the Lord, and may you for ever be blessed with them! and in order to it, see that you are like them now, that ye may "be followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

This is a proper season to examine yourselves, and call your souls to account in such language as this: My father, my mother, my honoured and superior kindred are gone to glory; their graces are perfected; and are not mine begun? What, have I no evidences for heaven yet ready? No exercises of faith, of love, of repentance, of true holiness? Are they arrived at heaven, and am I not yet travelling in the same road?

They were convinced of sin, and the danger of eternal death, so as to give themselves no rest till they found salvation. Have I ever been convinced of the sin of my nature, and the guilt of my life? Have I beheld myself exposed to the anger of God, and in danger of everlasting misery, so as to cry out with myself, What shall I do to be saved?

They have seen Jesus the Son of God, the all-sufficient Saviour, and have committed their souls by humble faith into his hands, to obtain pardon for the sake of his atonement, to be justified through his righteousness, to be renewed and made holy by the grace of his Spirit, and to be preserved to eternal glory. Now what have I seen of the excellency, or all-sufficiency, or necessity of Christ as a Mediator? Have I been persuaded to trust in him for my acceptance with God, to give my soul up to him as my guide, guard, and ruler, to be formed after his image, and to venture all my immortal concerns with him to be brought safe to heaven? Have I ever received him as my Lord and my Saviour, under those condescending characters and offices which he sustains for a sinner's salvation?

They have believed in him while he was unseen, and they loved him, though they saw him not; they rejoiced in him as their all, and they knew not how to live without him. How is it with my soul in this respect? Do I love Jesus the Lord?

Is he the desire of my heart, and the delight of my life?

Though they were kept by the grace of God from the pollutions of this world, and upheld their unblemished character to the last, yet they found sin to be their most dangerous enemy; they have felt it bitter and painful to their souls, and they long groaned under it as their daily burden. What is my grief? what my chief sorrow? Do I groan in this tabernacle being burdened, because of this inward enemy? And do I long to be rid of it? Are my sinful affections like a pain at my heart, and do the workings of sin within me awaken my continual repentance?

They maintained a sacred tenderness of conscience, and were afraid to indulge themselves in that company, in that practice, and in those liberties of life which have often proved a dangerous snare to souls. Now can I appeal to God, who sees my heart, that I am cautious and watchful against every snare, that I stand afar off from every temptation, and abstain from all appearance of evil?

They took sweet pleasure in retirement, in prayer and other holy exercises; this was the refreshment of their hearts, and the throne of grace was their refuge under every distress and difficulty. Let me ask my heart, what is my pleasure, my inward delight? Do I find a sweet relish in devotion? And when outward troubles perplex me, do I make the mercy-seat my speedy and constant refuge?

They lived upon their Bible, they counted the gospel their treasure, and the promises and the words of God written there were more valuable to them than all their outward riches. But what is my life? what is my treasure? what is my hope? Do I count heaven and the gospel my chief inheritance? Do I converse much with my Bible, and find food and support there? Do I look at things unseen and eter-

nal, and feed and rest upon the promised glories of another world, when I meet with disappointments here?

They had a large share of Christian experiences, a rich stock of divine and spiritual observations by much converse with God, and with their own souls. What have I got of this kind for the support of my soul? or are all these strange things to me?

Believe me, my dear and honoured friends, these are matters of infinite importance: I am sure you will think so one day; and I trust and persuade myself you think them so now. I cannot give myself leave to imagine that you put these thoughts far from you. Some of you have made it appear that they lie next your heart, and that your souls are deeply engaged in the ways of God and goodness. O that every one of you would give the same comfort and joy to your friends! Be not satisfied with a mere negative holiness, an unspotted character in the eyes of the world; but let the world know that you dare to be religious, and profess universal piety in a degenerate age. Let those that honour the memory of your parents, and love your souls, rejoice in your public Christianity. Let them know, that there are the foundations of heavenly glory laid within you all, and the blessed work begun on earth, that shall surely be made perfect among the spirits of the just in heaven.

And methinks I would not have you contented with the lowest seat there; but stir up yourselves to a most unwearied pursuit of holiness in the sublimer degrees of it. And thus labouring in the Christian race, contend for some of the brighter prizes, some of the richer crowns of glory. Be not satisfied to sit at a great distance below your parents departed, even in the heavenly country; but strive with a holy ambition that you may come near them,

that the whole family together may arrive at some superior degrees of blessedness. And O may divine grace grant me the pleasure to be a witness to your exalted stations, and to worship and rejoice amongst you there! Amen.

LONGING AFTER GOD.

Job xxiii. 3.

O that I knew where I might find him!

Among all the various kinds and orders of God's intellectual creation, there is not one that uses this language besides a mourning saint in this lower world. As for all other spirits, whether dwelling in flesh or not, their wishes are expressed in a very different manner; nor do they seek and long to find out an absent God.

If we ascend up to heaven, and inquire there what are the wishes of those blessed spirits, we shall find that their enjoyments are so glorious, and their satisfactions rise so high in the immediate presence of God amongst them, that they have nothing of this nature left to wish for; they know that their God is with them, and all their wish is what they are assured to enjoy, That this God will be with them for ever.

If we descend to the regions of hell, where God reigns in vengeance, we shall hear those unhappy spirits groaning out many a fruitless wish. "O that I knew where I might avoid him, that I might get out of his sight, out of his notice and reach for ever! I feel this dreadful presence, and O that it were possible for me to be utterly absent from him, and to find a place where God is not!"

If we take the wings of the morning, and fly to the utmost parts of the eastern or the western world, we shall find the language of those ignorant heathens, "O that I knew where I might find food, and plenty, and all sensual delights!" but they send not a wish after the great God, though he has been so

many ages absent from them and their fathers. He is unknown to them, and they have no desires working in them after an unknown God.

If we tarry at home and survey the bulk of mankind around us, the voice of their wishes sounds much the same as that of the heathen world. "O that I knew where I might find trade and merchandise, riches and honour, corn, wine, and oil, the necessaries or the superfluous luxuries of life!" But God is not in all their thoughts. If they frequent the temples, and attend the seasons of worship, they are well enough satisfied with outward forms without the sight of God in them. There is no natural man that with a sincere longing of soul cries out, "O that I knew where to find him!"

As for the children of God that live in the light of their Father's countenance, they walk with him daily and hourly, they behold him near them by the eye of faith, and they feel the sweet influences of his gracious presence; their highest ambition and their dearest wishes are, "Oh that he might abide for ever with me, and keep me for ever near to himself!"

The words of this scripture therefore can only be the language of a saint on earth in distress and darkness; when God, who was wont to visit him with divine communications, and to meet him in his addresses to the throne of grace, has withdrawn himself for a season, and left the soul to grapple with many difficulties alone.

This was the case of that holy man, whose sorrows and complaints have furnished out almost a whole book of scripture, and supplied the saints in all succeeding ages with the forms and speeches of pious mourning. It is the voice of a sacred impatience that Job here utters, "O that I knew where I might find him!" and by a plain paraphrase we may learn both the meaning and the reason of such language,

and be taught by his example to lament after an absent God.

Let us suppose the saint therefore pouring out his soul in such sort of expressions as these, in which I shall not entirely confine myself to the darkness of the patriarchal dispensation under which Job lived, but indulge the language of the New Testament, and personate a mourning Christian.

"Time was when I had a God near me, and upon every new distress and difficulty I made him my present refuge; I was wont to call upon him in an hour of darkness, and he shone upon my path with divine light. He has often taught me to read my duty in his providences, or in his word, or by some secret hints of his own Spirit, even while I have been kneeling at the throne of grace; but now I find not my usual signs and tokens, my guide and my counsellor is withdrawn. 'O that I knew where I might find him.'

"He was once my kind assistant in every duty and my support under every burden; I have found the grace of my Lord sufficient for me in my sharpest conflicts, his strength has appeared in my weakness. When my spiritual enemies have beset me round, he has scattered them before me, or subdued them under me; and being held up by his everlasting arms, I have stood my ground, and borne up my head under the weight of heavy sorrows; but now I am attacked on all sides, my soul wrestles hard with sins and temptations, and I find no assistance, no victory; I sink under my present sorrows; for my God, my strength, and my comforter, is absent, and afar off. 'O that I knew where I might find him!'

"My God was wont to deal with me as a compassionate friend; when Satan accused, he has justified. He has shown me the all-sufficient sacrifice of his Son, and that spotless righteousness of his which has an-

swered all the demands of his own holy law, and cancelled all the charges of guilt that the devil, or my own conscience could bring against me. He has taught me by faith to put my soul under the sprinklings of this sacred blood, and to wrap around me the robe of his divine righteousness; he himself has arrayed me in garments of salvation; but now the army of my sins rises up before me, and overwhelms my spirit with many terrors; Satan the accuser urges on the charge, and my Saviour and his righteousness are, as it were, hidden from me. 'O that I knew where I might find him!'

"Many a censure have I borne from men, and had my reputation assaulted, and my good name blackened with many a scandal. But when man reproached me, God has undertaken my cause, and made my righteousness shine as the light, and my innocence as the noon-day; I could then pour out my soul before him, tell him all my sorrows in flowing language, and feel sweet relief; but now, alas! troubles and reproaches are multiplied upon me, and he does not seem to take my part; my spirit is bound and shut up, and I am cut off from that free converse, that humble, holy intimacy which I once enjoyed with my God; 'I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard; I cry aloud, but there is no judgment.' Will he not help me to pray? Will he not hear my groans and requests? 'Hath God forgotten to be gracious?' Yet I would seek his face still, and 'O that I knew where I might find him!'

"Often have I seen him in his own ordinances in the place of public worship; I have seen his power and his glory in the sanctuary; I have found him in secret corners, and my meditation of him has been exceedingly sweet. In dark retirements he has smiled on my soul, and has often given me reviving light. I have found him in his works, and I have

had a fairer sight of him in his word; I can name the places, the pleasant lines in my Bible, and say, 'I have seen the face of my God here;' but now the Bible itself is like a sealed book, or like a strange language which I cannot understand; I hear not the voice of my God speaking to me there; I go forward to his promises, and read what he will do for his people, but I perceive him not; backward to his past providences, or to my own experiences, and review what he has done, but there is a darkness too; I turn to my left hand amongst his works of nature, but I do not see him; I seek him on my right hand amongst his works of grace, but still he hides himself that I cannot behold him, ver. 8, 9: 'I wander in the night and inquire after him,' I watch for him more than they that watch for the morning, I say more than they that watch for the morning; 'O that I knew where I might find him!'

"And it is no wonder that I am so impatient under the painful sense of his present distance from me, and so importunate for his return; for I have known the dreadful case of utter distance from him in a state of nature and sin, and I have tasted something of the pleasure of being brought nigh by grace; and now I dread every thing that looks like the old distance, that estrangement; I would fain renew those divine pleasures of a returning and a reconciled God; 'O that I knew where I might find him!'

"Besides, I bethink myself and say, 'What shall I do without a God!' for I find all creatures utterly insufficient to relieve and help me; and I have known something of God's all-sufficiency; he has been my helper in six troubles and in seven; he is my only hope; when creatures stand aloof from me, and each of them says, 'There is no help in me,' whither should I go then but to my God? 'O that I knew where I might find him!'

"I have been so much used to live upon him, and

found his divine aids and influences so necessary to my life and my peace, that I sink and die at his absence. I feel within myself a sort of heavenly instinct that I want his presence, and cannot live without him. I know he stands in no need of me, for he gives to all his creatures life, and breath, and being; but I need his counsels and his comforts, his strength and his love; my soul is touched with such a divine influence, that it cannot rest while God withdraws, as the needle trembles and hunts after the hidden loadstone. If my God retire and hide himself, he will forgive a creature that loves him so well as to follow hard after him without ceasing, and is impatient and restless till he search him out; 'O that I knew where I might find him!'

"Though God is pleased to depart from me for a season, yet I cannot let go all my hope; he hides himself from my soul, yet I dare not think him an enemy, but only a concealed friend; if I could get near him even to his seat, I know I should find it a mercy-seat, though perhaps judgment may sit there too. It is a throne of grace, says a Christian, because Jesus is there with the blood of atonement; and having such a High-priest over the house of God, and such a new and living way of access by the blood of Christ, I will seek after him and address myself to him; I will confess mine iniquities before him, and be sorry for my sins, which may have beclouded or eclipsed my heavenly sun, and hid his face from me; I fear I have grieved his blessed Spirit, and provoked him to withdraw his kind influences of light, strength, and comfort; nor will I cease grieving for his absence till he return again.

"Come, O eternal Spirit, come and visit my poor dark and disconsolate soul; come and awaken all my powers to follow hard after my Father and my God! Come, invigorate my faith, and lead me to the Mediator, the blessed Jesus; come, open to me

the promises, and let me into the covenant of his unchangeable love, ratified and sealed with blood. If ever I find my God again, it is there I know I must find him; Christ is the only way to the Father. It is by the interest of his Son I shall get near to him, even to his seat; then will I pour out all my woes and my wants in his sight, 'I will order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. Will he plead against me with his great power? No, but he will put strength in me,' and assist and suffer me to prevail with him.

"Then, 'when I have found him whom my soul loveth, I will hold him fast and not let him go;' I will charge all the powers and passions of my nature not to yield to one sinful practice, nor provoke him to depart, for he is my everlasting and my almighty Friend.

"Then, though I should have a thousand enemies 'set themselves against me, I would not be afraid;' 'yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,' for I have found my God, and my God is with me."

DEATH AND HEAVEN,

IN FIVE LYRIC ODES.

ODE I.

THE SPIRIT'S FAREWELL TO THE BODY AFTER LONG SICKNESS.

I.

How am I held a prisoner now,
Far from my God! This mortal chain
Binds me to sorrow; all below
Is short-lived ease or tiresome pain.

II.

When shall that wondrous hour appear,
Which frees me from this dark abode,
To live at large in regions, where
Nor cloud nor veil shall hide my God?

III.

Farewell this flesh, these ears, these eyes,
These snares and fetters of the mind;
My God, nor let this frame arise,
Till every dust be well refined.

IV.

JESUS, who mak'st our natures whole,
Mould me a body like thine own;
Then it shall better serve my soul
In works of praise and worlds unknown.

ODE II.

THE DEPARTING MOMENT; OR ABSENT FROM THE BODY.

I.

Absent from flesh! O blissful thought!
What unknown joys this moment brings!
Freed from the mischiefs sin has wrought,
From pains, and tears, and all their springs.

II.

Absent from flesh! Illustrious day!
Surprising scene! triumphant stroke,
That rends the prison of my clay,
And I can feel my fetters broke!

III.

Absent from flesh! Then rise, my soul,
Where feet or wings could never climb,
Beyond the heavens where planets roll,
Measuring the cares and joys of time.

IV.

I go where God and glory shine;
His presence makes eternal day.
My all that's mortal I resign,
For Uriel waits and points my way.

ODE III.

ENTRANCE INTO PARADISE; OR PRESENT WITH THE LORD.

I.

And is this heaven? And am I there?
How short the road! How swift the flight!
I am all life, all eye, all ear;
Jesus is here,—my soul's delight.

II.

Is this the heavenly Friend who hung
In blood and anguish on the tree,
Whom Paul proclaim'd, whom David sung,
Who died for them, who died for me?

III.

How fair, thou Offspring of my God!
Thou first-born Image of his face!
Thy death procured this blest abode,
Thy vital beams adorn the place.

IV.

Lo, he presents me at the throne
All spotless; there the Godhead reigns
Sublime and peaceful through the Son:
Awake, my voice, in heavenly strains.

ODE IV.

THE SIGHT OF GOD IN HEAVEN.

I.

Creator, God, eternal Light,
Fountain of good, tremendous Power,
Ocean of wonders, blissful sight!
Beauty and love unknown before!

II.

Thy grace, thy nature, all unknown
In yon dark region whence I came;
Where languid glimpses from thy throne
And feeble whispers teach thy name.

III.

I'm in a world where all is new;
Myself, my God; O blest amaze!
Not my best hopes or wishes knew
To form a shadow of this grace.

IV.

Fix'd on my God, my heart, adore;
My restless thoughts, forbear to rove;
Ye meaner passions, stir no more;
But all my powers be joy and love.

ODE V.

A FUNERAL ODE AT THE INTERMENT OF THE BODY, SUPPOSED TO BE SUNG BY THE MOURNERS.

I.

Unveil thy bosom, faithful tomb;
Take this new treasure to thy trust,
And give these sacred relics room
To seek a slumber in the dust.

II.

Nor pain, nor grief, nor anxious fear
Invade thy bounds. No mortal woes
Can reach the lovely sleeper here,
And angels watch her soft repose.

III.

So Jesus slept: God's dying Son
Pass'd through the grave, and bless'd the bed.

Rest here, fair saint; till from his throne
The morning break and pierce the shade.

IV.

Break from his throne, illustrious morn;
Attend, O earth, his sovereign word;
Restore thy trust, a glorious form;
She must ascend to meet her Lord.

THE END.